

ABSTRACT

EXCURSIONS TO MEET GOD AND RENEW THE SPIRIT

by

Charles R. Shonkwiler

Clergy easily fall into cycles of stress. Offering healthy ways of dealing with stress may assist clergy in remaining spiritually and physically healthy for the duration of their pastoral ministry.

The purpose of this study was to explore the unfolding dynamics among clergy participants during an excursion-backpacking trip. The trips evaluated were of three-day and two-night duration.

The project was designed to evaluate the participants' stressors using bio-ecological, vocational, psychological, or spiritual causes of stress. The stressors were identified using pre-event questionnaires and interviews.

The research used a liminal study to test the experience of the participants on the excursions. I followed the ability of participants to separate from everyday activities while on the excursions. As follow-up, I tested the change in practice of the participants as a result of their separation from the availability, accessibility trap of clergy in current culture.

The findings suggest male clergy in this ministry intervention project respond well to backpacking as a time of spiritual renewal and retreat. Their ability to separate from everyday stress in this type of event offers a healthy opportunity and model for responding to the four stressors evaluated in this research project.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
EXCURSIONS TO MEET GOD AND RENEW THE SPIRIT

presented by

Charles R. Shonkwiler

has been accepted toward fulfillment
of the requirements for the
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at
Asbury Theological Seminary

Mentor

April 19, 2007

Date

Internal Reader

April 19, 2007

Date

Dean, Doctor of Ministry Program

April 19, 2007

Date

EXCURSIONS TO MEET GOD AND RENEW THE SPIRIT

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

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May 2007

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe debts of gratitude to so many persons for the privilege and time allowed to complete this project. I begin with appreciation to my wife, Karen. She has allowed me time to do the research, attend classes, and most of all to backpack. Her encouragement to keep moving forward when I got bogged down or felt like quitting allowed me the strength to continue to the finish line.

To my children, I owe a lot. Joel, thanks for teaching me MLA style. Hannah, thanks for asking about the project. Sarah, thanks for understanding how important this project has been to me.

I give thanks to Don Joy for his patience as I relearned to write for academia. His feedback and editing helped me write better and keep my eyes on the final project. Don's passion for backpacking and outdoor experiences helped me keep believing that this project could benefit others as it has me.

For the nine pastors who were willing to pack their gear, take a walk in the wilderness, answer my questions, and be a part of this experiment, I am sincerely grateful. I could not have done this project without you. I regret that I am not able to share your names, but you know how appreciative I am of your time and willingness to assist.

To Leslie Andrews and Stacy Minger, I am thankful for the dissertation classes and for the program that encouraged me to grow as a pastor, student, and person.

Also, thank you Russell West. Your excitement about impacting clergy in their stress helped me to see value for this work.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

In my twenty-seven years as a full-time pastor, I have observed many behaviors in other pastors that I have come to understand as unhealthy. I know pastors who cancel a vacation because a parishioner is ill. Others leave for vacation but call the church back home at least once a day. Still others schedule preaching engagements on the Sundays of vacation. Pastors keep contact by cell phones and e-mail. For these pastors the sense of responsibility prevents them from a personal time of Sabbath or other separation that allows spiritual refreshment and renewal.

Some pastors seem to be able to survive for years without time away. All seems well in their personal and family lives, but repeatedly I see the long-term damage of a failure to spend regular time in spiritual self-care. The adage of burning the candle at both ends is often seen as showing one's dependence on God and as a reasonable expectation.

In the West Ohio United Methodist Annual Conference, health care insurance has become very expensive because health care insurance companies rate clergy as high risk (High-Level Analysis; see also Everett). Diabetes, heart disease, and obesity issues become more and more serious. Seminaries may have talked about healthy self-care practices, but the realities of parish life, the expectations of parishioners and pastors, and the accessibility found with cell phones, pagers, and e-mail add to expectation of availability. It is easy for pastors to stay engaged and never separate from "work." Pastors develop different ways of coping with the stress or choose simply to attempt to survive.

This study offers an alternative form of spiritual retreat to assist busy clergy in developing a healthy time of separation from the stresses of pastoral life. I used my experience to develop a regular pattern of retreat to evaluate its value to other pastors.

Stressors in Clergy Lives

Many conversations I have overheard and in which I have participated in the past twenty-seven years have involved members of the clergy talking about how busy they are. Often the conversations were more bragging about busyness than complaint. One observation is the sense clergy are supposed to be very busy, so the busier one is the more important she or he is in ministry.

Having completed the Master of Divinity degree at Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS) in 1980, I understood that clergy are to care for themselves. In my years at ATS, I experienced a focus on caring for the whole person. The student center was unusual for a seminary not connected to a university. The gymnasium, racquetball court, weight room, and swimming pool were places for exercise. The model was caring for the spiritual, psychological, intellectual, and physical parts of one's being.

Rowland Croucher identifies stressors coming to Christian leaders in four categories:

- (1) Bio-ecological factors related to poor diet (too much caffeine, refined white sugar, processed flour, salt etc.) and poor exercise habits. They also include noise and air pollution.
- (2) Vocational factors include career uncertainty; role ambiguity (a lack of clearly defined and mutually-agreed ministry functions); role conflict (between church expectations and personal or family needs); role overload (too many real or imagined expectations); lack of opportunities to “derole” and be yourself, for a change; loneliness (95% of Australian pastors do not have a spiritual director); time management frustrations—and many more.
- (3) Psychological factors relate principally to the great life—change stressors—from the most stressful (such as the loss of a spouse), through

divorce, death of a close family member, personal injury or illness, all the way to getting ready for Christmas or being handed a speeding fine!

(4) Spiritual causes of stress may include temptations of all kinds (sexual, despair if your church isn't growing, jealousy of the success of others, anxiety over financial problems, anger—"close to a professional vice in the contemporary ministry" says Henri Nouwen—and any other way the devil can get at us). Even prayer can be stressful according to one study!

I have used these four categories to track stressors for clergy.

Personal Experience with the Problem

When I finished seminary in 1980, I had developed a plan for ministry for the long-term. It involved caring for the spiritual, physical, and mental parts of life. I knew that regular prayer and devotions were important. I was in an exercise program, and I also scheduled a day off each week. I was depending on mentors for my further development.

The plan was good on paper. Exercise stayed an important part of my weekly activities and led to competitive swimming, hiking, and family activities. The spiritual development involved time spent preparing the sermon and developing the weekly worship services. My acquisition of knowledge was easy to continue because I enjoy learning, so attending workshops and seminars was a regular part of my life.

As the years went by, weeks counted with no real day off. Preparation for worship was not enough of a devotional life to maintain good spiritual health. Little by little depression set in and life became more difficult. Pastoral ministry was not always rewarding. My ministry was often filled with criticism and a lack of appreciation for the offers of leadership for declining congregations.

I recognized stress as a factor in what I was learning about myself, but they were not conscious enough to become important. I knew that a week on the beaches along the Gulf of Mexico offered refreshment in my life: watching sunsets, playing with our

children, enjoying God's creatures—dolphins, sand rays, octopi, starfish, and others—filled me with life. I also knew that time in the Great Smoky Mountains was refreshing. Long hikes with my wife, short hikes with our children, and picnics along the way were just some of the things I knew gave me life. I enjoyed God's creation. I especially enjoyed the sights and sounds of creation away from work.

Still, I did not have a plan for dealing with the depression that was taking over my life. Church work was more and more difficult. Dealing with family situations became more and more difficult. Finally, in late summer 1992, my life crashed in around me. I was spiritually dry. I had barely enough energy to do the preparation for worship. If not for the exercise, it may have been much worse. I had put a thick shell around my life, and it was not protecting me from the depression.

Fortunately, the situation I created for myself forced me to seek help. The assistance was in the form of a Christian therapist who guided me in dealing with the depression in my life. I began to work on my family relationships and was fortunate enough to be married to a woman who was willing to work with me. The thing that took the most work was developing peer relationships and risking a vulnerability that would allow me to be more useful to God. In this process, I have continued to discover ways to allow God to nurture his Spirit in me and to share that with others.

In February 1998, I began attending the modules of the Beeson Institute for Advanced Church Leadership. One helpful result of this program was the opportunity to develop the support of a group of pastors who take learning and sharing seriously. We met at the three sessions each year and met between sessions. When we finished the nine modules, we continued to meet eight to ten times each year. A few of us started a year

behind, and those who finished continued to attend modules occasionally to keep skills fresh. As part of this Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree program, I repeated some of the modules with the extra work of this program. Apparently, I can be a slow learner because on the second time around some things finally took root for me. The module dealing with relationships with our spouses and clergy self-care was one that especially helped me when I attended it for the second time.

During the time of the self-care class, I was revisiting the commitments I had made to care for myself at the completion of seminary in 1980. I know that physical activity is important to being a good steward of the health God provides. I know a good devotional life helps keep me spiritually healthy, and I know that being a part of a group of two or three will help me maintain a good comprehensive self-care program. Maybe one of the most important things I have learned and am attempting to apply is that self-care is not done alone. Self-care improves with accountability. I also believe people need to discover ways to allow nurture by God's Spirit and include those activities in their lives.

This project comes out of areas of self-discovery in my life. As I was reading for the Clergy Self-Care class in this DMin program, Bill Hybels' book especially spoke to me. I knew that time hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains was beneficial, but I had not seen it as truly helpful spiritually. When Hybels talks about different "Pathways" to maintaining balance and health (224-25), I had a real wake-up call. Time in God's creation is truly important to my spiritual health.

Nine months before that class, I had been on my first backpacking trip since my early teens as a Boy Scout. It was physically challenging, sometimes even painful, but it

was exhilarating. I came away from that three-day voyage into God's relatively unspoiled creation ready to plan my next excursion. I was physically depleted but on a wonderful high with God.

Since that trip in the early fall of 2001, I have taken at least three trips a year. My privilege was to share many of these trips with a long-time friend who has walked through my most difficult times and now shares my passion for renewal in God's creation. I have shared with my son, daughter, and son-in-law, and I have shared a number of special hikes with my wife.

My passion for maintaining a fresh relationship with God fuels my desire to see if others will benefit from backpacking and camping in backcountry settings. I hope to develop a program that will offer a positive model for making these excursions a part of a healthy self-care regimen. The problem I desired to address comes out of my passion to share the self-care practices I learned.

Problem

Clergy find themselves in a time when stress is an increasing problem. Sage says clergy are vulnerable to taking care of others but not caring for themselves. With studies that show clergy to be high risk for health insurance coverage and studies that show lack of physical activity and diet as part of the problem, clergy benefit from a move toward caring for themselves spiritually, emotionally and physically.

Clergy find themselves with growing expectations they will be always accessible and available to members of their congregation. This expectation, lack of role clarity, and tendencies to expect too much of themselves may create an unhealthy lifestyle for clergy. This pattern can make spiritual retreat and renewal difficult, further complicating the

unhealthy pattern. Separating from the congregational setting can also be traumatic for pastors who believe that being available is part of their duty. Providing a way for clergy to separate from this accessibility through backcountry excursions may provide a way for clergy to separate from the stress of constant availability and provide better access to spiritual renewal.

Purpose

The purpose of the research was to explore the unfolding dynamics among the participants during a three-day clergy excursion backpacking experience for its ability to increase the participants' sense of spiritual health and well-being as they reconnect with God and spend time away from daily routines.

Research Questions

To determine the effect of this model of spiritual retreat on the lives of the participants in this study, I used the following research questions.

Research Question #1

In what ways were participants experiencing the four stressors—bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, or spiritual causes of stress as identified by Rowland Croucher—prior to leaving on the three-day excursion ministry intervention retreats?

Research Question #2

How did the participants experience the three-day excursion?

Research Question #3

What impact did the three-day backcountry retreat demonstrate on aspects of clergy spiritual health in the areas of Croucher's four stressors?

Propositions

In addition to the research questions listed above, I also used the following propositions to evaluate the impact of the ministry intervention events used in this study. Based on the research, I can predict given my 4-part theory that participants who make this excursion will

1. have an exhilarating physical experience,
2. find the separation from the accessibility, availability cycle of pastoring to be refreshing,
3. leave with a sense of God's refreshing, renewing power, and
4. commit to a regular practice of three-day separations for spiritual renewal.

Definition of Terms

"Liminality" (from the Latin word *līmen*, meaning "a threshold") is the quality of the second stage of a ritual in the theories of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and others. In these theories, a ritual, especially a rite of passage, involves some change to the participants, especially their social status. This change is accomplished by separating the participants from the rest of their social group (the first, or preliminary stage: separation); a period during which one is "betwixt and between," neither one status nor the other (the liminal stage); and, a period during which one's new social status is confirmed (the final, or postliminal stage: reincorporation).

The liminal state is characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation. Liminality is a period of transition during which one's normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to something new.

Backcountry is an area reached only on foot or horseback. For this study, the backcountry areas used were within the boundaries of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and were accessed on foot (hiking).

Excursion camping is an event set in the backcountry where participants access campsites by hiking. For the purpose of this study, the events involve carrying supplies in backpacks.

Clergy accessibility is the ability of clergy to be contacted, in this case the ease of contact clergy face in this generation through e-mail and cell phones.

Spiritual retreat is a time away from the daily routine for the sake of reconnecting with the God of the Holy Bible for improving spiritual health.

Ministry Intervention

The study was a ministry intervention in the form of a three-day, two-night excursion backpacking retreat. I staged the event in the Cades Cove area in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I followed the same pattern for two events. The first event took place 9-11 October 2006 and the second 16-18 October 2006.

To prepare for the event, each participant received a list of gear and supplies needed for the excursion. Because we carried all our needs in backpacks, we checked our gear that morning, carefully loaded our sleeping bags, clothing, food, and other gear in our backpacks and traveled to the trailhead.

We marked the beginning of the event with a shared Bible study. At the conclusion of the Bible study, we placed our backpacks on our backs and started on the three-day journey. Beginning in the parking lot for the Abram's Falls Trailhead, we moved to the Wet Bottoms trail and followed it to the Cooper Road Trail. We turned left

on the Cooper Road Trail and followed it to the Beard Cane Trail. While on the Cooper Road Trail, we stopped for lunch and took other breaks as necessary. Turning right onto Beard Cane Trail, we followed it for approximately one-half mile to campsite #11, our place for that night.

We filled our evening with setting up camp, purifying water for consumption, preparing dinner, and spending time for relaxation and conversation. Participants were free to retire for the evening at their pleasure.

Day 2 began with breakfast and the second part of our Bible study for the event. After finishing, we packed camp and prepared for our second part of the excursion. The beginning of the hike led us to backtrack the last half mile of the first day. We then continued our trek on Cooper Road Trail. When we arrived at Cane Creek Trail, we followed it to the left. We stopped for lunch at campsite #1. As we shared lunch, we took time for conversation about our experience on the trail. Campsite #1 has a good source of water, so we checked our water supply and purified water as needed.

After lunch, we continued on Cane Creek Trail until we arrived at Little Bottom Trail. We turned left at this trail and followed it to campsite #17. Here, we set up camp for the evening, purified water for drinking and cooking, gathered wood for a campfire, prepared and consumed supper, and had a relaxing evening of sharing one-on-one, in groups, and as a whole group. We retired for the night's rest as we chose.

Day three began with breakfast and the Bible study. With both completed, we packed up camp and began the final leg of our excursion. We continued on Little Bottom Trail to its end. At that point, we joined Abram's Falls Trail. The treat for this leg was

viewing Abram's Falls. With all God's creation experienced to this point, the falls was the highlight of the excursion.

We continued our trek to the trailhead where we had begun our event on Monday, loaded our cars and began our trip home. As a final act of community, we stopped at a restaurant for a shared meal. As we ate, we shared our experiences, closed the event, and moved toward home.

Methodology

The methodology section of this project describes the evaluative study that used the descriptive method to explore the response of the participants to the ministry intervention excursion.

Subjects

I selected the nine clergy participants for this event by personal invitation and word of mouth recruitment. The participants were male clergy who were willing to participate in my research project. Each participant was available for the scheduled excursion interventions.

Instruments

I used the following instruments:

First, before the three-day ministry intervention event, each participant filled out a questionnaire to describe his current self-care practices, and I interviewed each participant (see Appendix B). The interview began with the participant describing a stress event he experienced in the past four weeks. Follow-up questions assisted me in placing the stress in one of the categories—bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, or spiritual causes of stress as described by Croucher.

Second, during the three-day event, I used the participant-observation model (Jorgensen). I watched for ritual liminal responses on the model described by Turner. Each participant kept a field journal to assist him in monitoring responses to the event. I provided questions to the participants to assist in their journaling (see Appendix A).

Third, I conducted a post-event interview to assist in my exploration of the participants' responses to the ministry intervention event (see Appendix C). I used this interview to confirm or clarify my observations of each participant.

Data Collection

I used the following instruments and procedures to gather data. The pre-event interviews provided the baseline for observations gathered during the event. Using Croucher's four stressors—bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, or spiritual causes of stress—assisted me in exploring the participants' awareness of stressors in their lives coming into the event.

I used my field journal to monitor the ritual liminal responses during the event. I was intentional to monitor separation from ministry situations, ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. I carefully recorded participants' movement through the liminal stages.

Following the event, I asked each participant to read entries in his journal just prior to our scheduled interview. With the journal in his lap, I conducted an open-ended interview to check my observations.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data around the three research questions. As I collected the data, I was careful to categorize and sort the data in response to my research questions.

With the baseline set during the pre-event interviews, I watched participants' responses. I tracked their responses based on the stressors in their lives coming into the event. I watched for responses along the excursion. Using my field journal, I logged the observed responses. Analyzing these responses, I carefully tracked how the stressors affected the participants' ability to move into the liminal phases.

I used the information gathered during the ministry intervention event to compare the participants' sense of their responses to my observations. During the post-event interview, I checked my observations against the perception of the participants. I documented similarities and differences and hypothesized why these differences occurred.

Variables

The independent variables in this ministry intervention are the curriculum and excursion. Each participant hiked the same distance. The conditions of the trail and weather were the same for all participants. I monitored the fatigue of participants to be sure I provided breaks to make the day's hike a celebration for each participant. We shared meals at a common time and place. We shared conversation along the way and around the campfire each evening. I was careful to provide a program that was the same for each participant.

The dependent variable included the participant's level of stress coming into the event. Each participant's spiritual well-being affected his ability to disengage from his ministry setting and fully participate in the event. Impending serious events in the participants' ministry setting provided distractions for disengaging from the setting and engaging in the ministry intervention program.

Delimitations and Generalizability

The study sample limits the research. This study sample is small, only twelve participants. The size of the population in the study cannot predict that similar backpacking excursions would have the same or similar results on the participants. It cannot predict how such a trip may or may not positively affect the spiritual well-being of all clergy; however, similar results from backpacking trips with groups of one or two and my experiences in recent years do assist in making predictions of results.

The use of two groups of participants does broaden the research, yet the interaction of group dynamics shaped the response of members of the group. Differences in physical conditions (i.e., weather and trail conditions) influence the group dynamics and personal responses. One might generalize that these external conditions will influence any group attempting to replicate this research.

Biblical and Theological Basis for Clergy Self-Care

In a teaching setting on the New Testament, the other participants and I were encouraged by the speaker to read the entire book of Mark in one sitting. His reason was for us to each to get a sense of the rhythm of Jesus' life. We were asked to pay attention to the time Jesus spent time working, then to see the example of getting away, when "After leaving them, he [Jesus] went up on a mountainside to pray" (Mark 6:33, NLT).

The premise was that even Jesus needed time to go off alone and pray. In the Gospel of Mark, the pace of Jesus' travels would make anyone tired, so Jesus' model was to go off alone and pray. Jesus was also fully human, so just like all humans, he became tired, physically and spiritually. I believe Jesus was caring for his need for renewal and refreshment as he modeled self-care for his disciples.

I do allow that Jesus' uniqueness provided for him a source of spiritual energy exceeding what is available to other humans. I do not want to place others alongside Jesus. I want to learn from his model of caring for himself through prayer and time apart.

In the creation story of Genesis chapter one, God is said to have created the heavens and the earth and all living things in six days. "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen 2:3). It does not say that God just had to rest. It simply says that God rested and made the seventh day holy.

Later as God shared with the Hebrew people God's rules for living, again the seventh day, the Sabbath, is marked as a special day. In Exodus 20:8-11, the readers are encouraged to observe the Sabbath:

Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; then he rested on the seventh day. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

As I reflect on this passage, I am reminded that what God counts as important is worth my careful consideration. Pointing back to the creation story and bringing the practice of a holy seventh day, God shared the design for this day as a time free from work. This passage in Exodus states that the Sabbath is not simply a time for rest from the week's routine, but it is also a time dedicated to God.

A call to minister words of life and healing on the Christian Sabbath appears to allow, even necessitate, that those of us with a calling to ordained ministry need a time of

Sabbath at another time of the week. A specific day for Sabbath is not designated, or is it stated that it be the Sabbath day needs to be the same day each week (Oswald 123). He does not mention a specific day as being necessary for a healthy rhythm of Christian living; however, choosing the same day each week makes sense. Strongly implied is the importance of Sabbath, so the regular practice of a day of rest dedicated to God is necessary to spiritual health (C. Brown 405).

The Apostle Paul used the Sabbath as a time to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. He found those gathered in the community synagogue or, where no synagogue existed, he searched along the river to find those who had gathered to worship the living God. Again, one called to a special ministry, Paul spent the Sabbath working for the LORD and needed to find another time for his Sabbath rest day (Acts 13:14-17, 44-47; 16:13).

In addition to the need for spiritual health, the need for physical health is important. Part of being good stewards of what God has given is the importance of maintaining an exercise program that will promote good health.

Exercise experts teach that twenty minutes of aerobic activity three or four times a week is necessary for heart health. As part of a healthy life, especially in a culture where daily work does not always provide this kind of physical activity, exercise is important.

A theology of being good stewards of what God provides will encourage caring for the whole person as Christians work toward a lifestyle of spiritual and physical health.

Overview of Study

Chapter 2 summarizes the literature reporting of related research to this study. Chapter 3 shows the design for the study. Chapter 4 reports the findings and their

significance. Chapter 5 completes the dissertation with an interpretation and discussion of the findings and newly identified areas for further needed research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Renewal opportunities for members of the clergy have been an increasing area of interest and concern in recent years. This literature review looks at models for renewal in Scripture, articles that address stressors in the lives of clergy, intervention models currently in use, benefits of physical exercise, and literature in outdoor education.

Scripture

The following section looks at scriptural foundations for the study.

Sabbath Practices

Sabbath is deeply rooted in the teachings of Scripture. Beginning with the account of Creation, God used six days to create the heavens and the earth and rested on the seventh day (Gen. 1-2). The Exodus story adds the teaching that Sabbath relates to freedom from slavery/bondage, a day for honoring God's creativity and an imitation of God's rest (Bass 80; Exod. 16; 31).

Jesus' pace of life and practice is the beginning place for evaluating time away from parish ministry for this study. In the writings of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is quickly moving from one ministry setting to the next. Mark has compacted time to share what he considered important ministry activities.

The NIV Biblical Commentary on Mark speaks of the time of prayer in Mark chapter six as well as five other times in Mark's gospel when Jesus went away for a time of prayer. Each time was one of impending crisis, so Jesus took time to separate himself from his surroundings for a time of prayer (Baker and Kohlenberger).

Mark 6 sets the scenario of sending them into stormy seas as he dismissed the crowd and went off to pray. Jesus' time of prayer concluded, and he went off to join his disciples. In the darkest hour of their need, Jesus joined them, calmed the storm, and sailed with them across the lake. Jesus' calm presence modeled again for the disciples a faith in the power of God. They had another opportunity to learn peace in the midst of the storms of life from Jesus (Cole 115-16; Oden and Hall 94).

The model of Jesus—prayerful preparation, time away before engaging in crisis situations, and involvement in crisis situations with a calm—is valuable for those who offer ministry in his name. A goal to emulate Jesus in this way may assist clergy in maintaining balance in the hectic pace of ministry in this age.

The origin of Sabbath is rooted in the creation story of Genesis. God used six days to create the heavens, the earth, and all living things. “And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from his work of creation” (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbath day is a day of rest from work and set aside as a holy day continues to be a holy practice. The mention of honoring the Sabbath is in all parts of the Old Testament law. It is the most strongly emphasized of the commandments of God (C. Brown 405). In studying the Sabbath, I also found Jesus speaking about the Sabbath as a time for healing (409). The Pharisaic Judaism of Jesus' time would allow the rescue of a mule from a ditch but questioned Jesus' healings on the Sabbath (see Matt. 12: 9-13).

In addition to Jesus' care for his spiritual well-being, he also encouraged his disciples to get away from the crowds and work. After they returned from a ministry tour where Jesus had sent them out two by two, “Jesus said, ‘Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest’” (Mark 6: 31). They got on a boat and traveled. The time on the boat

provided separation from their busy schedule. Jesus implies the work of casting out demons and healing was tiring work, and they were in need of a time of rest. This model of separation from work encouraged the disciples to practice renewal.

Jesus' model of going off into the mountains, to the Garden of Gethsemane, or to other locations is a model of separation for spiritual well-being. His encouragement to his disciples follows that pattern. The need for servants of God to share this pattern would also seem to be important. I also find this pattern helpful.

Sharing Ministry

Exodus 18 records a conversation between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro watched as Moses spent what had become a normal day of solving problems for the people of Israel. One of the things that Jethro saw was Moses was attempting to do too much. Rather than sharing the burden of the ministry needs of the Israelites, Moses was attempting to take care of all the needs. Jethro recommended that Moses share the responsibility:

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves. (Exod. 18:24-26)

The division of the work appears to have been done by tribe and family unit with leaders of tribes and families caring for the lesser needs as Moses continued to hear the more difficult cases (Keil and Delitzsch 86-87).

Pastors who wish to follow a godly model for ministry might easily adopt the model Jethro suggested to Moses: ministry is best accomplished by a team. When pastors see themselves as the only ones in a congregation who can minister, they may not take

the necessary time for renewal. The importance of maintaining a balance between ministry and self-care is the focus (Shucksmith 150). As with Moses, when one uses the resources of the community she or he is able to accomplish more godly work while maintaining better balance in life.

When King Jehoshaphat had the challenge of facing a large army with the much smaller army of Judah, he was greatly concerned. He understood he was responsible to defend the integrity of his nation and people. As he struggled going to battle with inadequate resources, he was reminded that the battle was not his but the Lord's (2 Chron. 20:15).

Jehoshaphat can be a good reminder for a better practice, if pastors fall into the sense that ministry will only be accomplished when they are present to lead the people,. Jehoshaphat recognized that he had no power of his own. When he heard from Jehaziel, the prophet of God, he understood the battle he faced was the Lord's, and he trusted:

He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'" (2 Chron. 20:15-17, NIV)

As Jehoshaphat obeyed this understanding, singers led the army and God provided the victory for Israel. The work of ministry is the Lord's. Faithful servants work diligently to serve God while they also remember that ultimately the work is the Lord's. If they imagine they are "married to the church," they commit bigamy. The Church has a husband, and he is not the pastor.

From Moses and Jehoshaphat, pastors can learn that taking too much responsibility will not honor God. Sharing responsibility for ministry and remembering that the work is of the Lord will help pastors give themselves permission to spend the necessary time caring for their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs. Healthy pastors are of great value to the work of the Lord.

Spiritual Journeys/Pilgrimage

I have enjoyed spiritual journeys others might not see as spiritual. These journeys into unfamiliar territory have been occasions to experience God. Some of the journeys have been physically demanding and challenging. Others have been simpler yet filled with other demands (i.e., physical comfort or noise). When one looks at the sense of pilgrimage in the teaching of Scripture, it adds meaning to these journeys.

A t-shirt sold in places near backpacking trails says, “The journey is the destination.” As another on a journey and I reflected on this quote, we came to see the biblical truth in it. We recognized that we are on a journey, and our goal is to journey with God much like Abraham and others have journeyed.

Those who are open to finding something more than what they face each day undertake journeys. They are willing to leave their places of comfort to experience something new. Unknown components may fill the journey, but the person on the journey is willing to risk separation and discomfort for the potential benefit of the journey.

Saint Augustine mentions a common understanding of traveling on the Christian journey. Here he speaks of human beings as those who naturally long for God: “The thought of you [God] stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you”

(21). Being stirred by God, as one travels in relationship with God and toward deeper relationship, is a part of our journey.

Jesus shared with his disciples that he chose them; they did not choose him (John 15:16). They in turn chose to follow Jesus' path on their journey. Following Jesus was in response to his call to them to follow. Patricia D. Brown notes, "Every pilgrimage begins with a call from God. It is always personal, for it is an invitation to go deeper into the fullness of Christ" (69). God always initiates spiritual journeys.

Pilgrims are those who are strangers, travelers in a foreign land or sojourners. The word "pilgrimage" has its root in the Latin *peregrinus*, which means "stranger." The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) notes the English translations show very little difference in the words "stranger," "sojourner," and "alien." In making a detailed comparison of the four Hebrew words translated with the noted English words, the ISBE observes that, despite some particular nuances, the meanings overlap considerably (Block 563).

Describing pilgrimage, P. Brown refers to it as a process where the physical and spiritual paths are deeply interconnected. The pilgrim is reaching for abundance from God. Difficulties along the journey do not stop the one on the journey. Leaving home behind, the new home for the pilgrim is the journey itself (69-70). For P. Brown pilgrimage includes the physical journey, however, metaphorically pilgrimage often describes the Christian life.

Tom Wright begins the Christian pilgrimage at baptism (30). "The very meaning of baptism is precisely that you have set out on a pilgrim path, following Jesus in the way of the cross. That is who you are, by definition" (32). The journey like that of Abraham

has an impact on the life of faithfully following God, but the pilgrim path may never involve physical movement to a different, new location. Nevertheless, the metaphor for pilgrimage is strong and used often in scriptural texts about the Christian life.

From the time Abraham responds to God's call to leave his home and follow where God leads (Gen. 12:1-9), journeys are recorded in Scripture. In addition to the movement of Abraham following God, here are but a few of the travels mentioned: the Hebrew people traveling to Egypt to join Joseph (Gen. 45), the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt (Exod. 12), their meandering for forty years before entering into the Promised Land (Deut. 4:14), the travels of many in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the travels of Jesus, the disciples, and the journeys of Paul. Following God involves physical movement. Even though following God may not mean physical travel, journeying may be a meaningful activity for those who desire a closer relationship with God.

The defining example of call to follow God on journey is that of Abraham (Abram). God's commands are straightforward: "leave" and "go" (Gen. 12:1). God's intention for Abram and Sarai are without question (later named Abraham and Sarah, Gen. 17: 5). They are to leave their home, abandon everything, and go where God leads them. They walked with God to the land God showed to them. In the Hebrew, the word *halak* (leave, go) can also be translated "walk." *Halak* is the word used of Abram and Lot's actions of response in 12:3. As they follow God's commands, they are walking. On this walk, God appears to Abram for the first time.

God marks the rest of Abraham's life by this pilgrimage, trial of faith. John Skinner notes the pilgrimage that Abraham walks is a trial of faith (243). All the travels

of Abraham are involved in his pilgrimage. He left all that was familiar behind him: his family and even his father's house. The goal of his travels was intentionally unclear (a land which I [God] will show you); (Gen. 12:1) makes the faith journey of Abraham even more heroic (243). A life of faith, filled with trials, leads Abraham to reach the goal God set.

Abraham's life of faithful following is an apt model even today. His travels led him into Shechem (a valley), Bethel (hill country,) and the Negev (a desert). Abraham traveled in and through the Promised Land. He lived all of life there; he worshiped there. He walked in and through it and lived in this land.

Abraham shared his life of travel with the Hebrew people. The nation of Israel built their cycle of life around Jerusalem. Each year the Israelites were to gather in Jerusalem for three feast times: the Feast of Passover, the commemorative celebration of God's acts of saving them from slavery in Egypt; the Feast of Pentecost, an early summer celebration to renew the Israelites' covenant commitments to God; and, the Feast of the Tabernacle, celebrated in the fall of the year as a time of thanksgiving for the blessing of God's harvests. Eugene H. Peterson mentions Psalms 120-34 as songs shared by these pilgrims as they again traveled to the center of their spiritual lives, Jerusalem (18-19). The words of these Psalms known as the Psalms of the Ascents helped to remind the pilgrims of God's presence with them in their travels.

Having reviewed some scriptural need and pattern for renewal, I will now look at literature dealing with liminality, clergy stressors, and self-care.

Liminality

The term “liminality” does not appear in many dictionaries. The term “liminal” does appear in the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). The OED lists liminal as being rarely used and defines it as: “Of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process.” A notation says that “liminal” first appears in a publication in the field of psychology in 1884. In 1909, van Gennep introduced the idea of liminal experience into the field of anthropology in his work, The Rights of Passage. He uses liminal to describe rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage as having three-part structure: separation, liminal period, and re-assimilation. The person in the midst of the ritual is stripped of the social status she or he possessed before the ritual, placed in the liminal period of transition, and re-assimilated into society with her or his new status (LaShure).

All three of the positions: separation, liminal period, and re-assimilation are important; however, David Adam Lertzman cites Turner as spending most of his research focusing on the liminal period. Lertzman notes that Turner focuses on the state of being neither here nor there. He renames the three phases as separation, transformation, and integration. The transformation phase is the most important, the whole aim of rites of passage. Separation removes a person from her or his daily life for facing a transformation. This transformation refers to the core experience of rites of passage. Integration is the reintroduction into community where the whole experience of separation and transformation is put together (Lertzman).

In a Christian context, a number of rites of passage can exist. Some examples are baptism, marriage, confirmation, and ordination. Through these rites or rituals, persons

cross from outsider to insider, single to married, and laity to clergy (Hanson 154). The liminal process in some of these rites can be quite brief, but the change of status is easily recognized.

Concerning the Gospel of Matthew, K. C. Hanson focuses on Jesus' journeys to the mountains and transitions made in those trips or pilgrimages. One instance is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chapters 5-7). In this setting Jesus delivers his first body of teaching. Jesus' followers gathered on the mountain, away from their homes. He delivered the body of teaching (liminal phase). Following the time of teaching, the followers returned to their homes initiated into the new status as those who have heard the core message of Jesus (161).

Another time of transition on a mountain is Jesus' gathering his disciples for their commissioning (Matt. 28:16-20). The Gospel of Matthew records this time of commissioning as Jesus' final conversation with the eleven remaining disciples after his death and resurrection. The conversation is a time of preparing for separation. The only persons present are Jesus and the eleven disciples. In this setting, a time betwixt-and-between, they receive final instructions. At this time, they are sent not to the lost sheep of Israel but to the whole world. They also have additional instructions not shared before: teach and baptize (v. 20). This passage implies reassimilation. As the scene ends, they are still on the mountain. Jesus is still in their midst. Hanson suggests the open-endedness of this narrative signifies lack of closure and a sense that the disciples will write their own ending (166-67).

Craig Scandrett-Leatherman studied the liminal experience of the annual retreats of the Irving Park Free Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois. In those retreats, he notes

rites of passage in three-day events. His study of the camp meeting informs his sense of the liminal phases of the retreats. In Turner's (1977) typology, the camp meeting was "anti-structural" ritual of Christian worship removed from the weekly structures of church and agricultural labor. In camp meeting settings, individuals and families gathered at the camp meeting site. The housing was quite modest, resembling slave quarters. Meals were shared in common, and the worship meetings were held in tents or open-sided buildings called tabernacles. The setting offered separation from the normal routines of life. The time together was liminal in nature, a time betwixt and between normal activities. For instance, camp meetings were held in the month of August, a time when farmers were between planting and harvesting. The participants were equal in status, allowing them to reenter their normal routine with a model of life based on commonalities (Scandrett-Leatherman 319-20).

The Irving Park Free Methodist Church retreats shared common practices with the camp meeting style. The retreats occurred in locations where participants shared simple, dormitory style housing. Only families with small children received rooming for their families. Groups of men shared large rooms, as did the groups of women. The separation from daily life included talent shows where persons would set aside their normal position in society. For instance, a pastor with a PhD played the wounded man in a skit about the Good Samaritan and was carted off in a wheelbarrow, which he hung over. The retreat time was betwixt-and-between the everyday world and changed persons reentering the everyday world. The focus on celebrating the Lord's Supper (Communion) at the end of the retreat allowed the monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper in the normal Sunday worship or this congregation to be a reminder of the shared experiences of retreat. From

the departure from their respective homes to travel to the retreats, through the retreat times, to the return home with new sense of fellowship and small group support, the liminal experience of the retreats offered persons and family units opportunity to be shaped by different realities experienced in the community life of retreat (320-22).

In the writings of Lertzman and Scandrett-Leatherman, liminal experiences are noted in their discussions of pilgrimage. Joseph Z.T. Pieper and Marinus H. F. Van Uden studied the pilgrimages to Lourdes for liminal value. They quote Victor and Edith L. B. Turner in Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture:

Pilgrimage has some of the liminal passage rites: release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior; *communitas*, both on the journey and as a characteristic of the goal, which is in itself a source of *communitas*, healing and renewal; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of religious and cultural core-values; ritualized reenactment of correspondences between a religious paradigm and shared human experiences; movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which suddenly, transiently, becomes central for the individual, an *axis mundi* of his faith; movement in general (as against stasis), symbolizing the elusiveness and temporal transience of *communitas*; individuality posed against the institutionalized milieu; and so forth. (253-54)

Pilgrimage at Lourdes involves many of these items. Persons leave home to travel to Lourdes. At Lourdes, they seek miracles, separation from the normal day-to-day activities of life. They return home from pilgrimage. People come from all occupations and blend into *communitas*. They come seeking affirmation for their faith. They return home having made pilgrimage (Pieper and Van Uden).

Turner's studies are to great extent responsible for setting the stage for studies focusing on liminality. In "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," Turner presents material on a study of dramatic theater as liminal experience:

Public reflexivity is also concerned with what I have called “liminality.” This term, literally “being-on-a-threshold,” means a state of process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status.... [A]nother way of putting it would be to say that the liminal socio-cultural process is similar to the subjunctive mood in verbs—just as mundane socio-structural activities resemble the indicative mood. Liminality is full of potency and potentiality. (465-66)

This sets the stage for humanly meaningful action (Deflem 22).

For purposes of this study, I will use the liminal frame to evaluate the response of the participants to a time of separation from day-to-day, a time of betwixt-and-between, and reintroduction. Turner’s model will inform my evaluation. The interaction of the other writers cited in this section assist this process.

Four Areas of Stress

Croucher lists four areas of stress prevalent in the lives of clergy: bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, and spiritual factors.

Bio-Ecological Factors

In addition to the stressors in the life of clergy, Priscilla W. Blanton and M. Lane Morris cite Archibald Hart who identifies an isolated and sedentary life as common in clergy. This isolation can lead to a sense of depression. Whether clinical or simply from fatigue, not taking care of one’s body will only heighten any depression in one’s life (332; see also Hart; and Demaray and Pickerell).

Vocational Factors

Studies of Roman Catholic clergy show the schedule of life and significant time alone as a major area of stress in their lives (Virginia 63). Secular priests especially find time alone to be a contributing factor for stress in life. Secular priests are those who live outside a community of Roman Catholic brothers. The demands of parish ministry create

a busyness and level of distraction. Without the support of a community of brothers, their lives are marked with elevated stress and the sense of loneliness.

A recurring issue for clergy well-being is appropriate care for oneself in the face of demands from parishioners (Blanton and Morris 332). Blanton and Morris also cite the sense clergy are to be caretakers, so it is not be easy to find time for self-care. Clergy tend to take care of others first without caring for themselves. For the pastor who has a spouse and/or children to place other demands on her or his life, demands from parishioners are even more complicated (“Clergy and Other Caregivers”). Clergy have a difficult time while attempting to satisfy both the time demands of parish and family.

Another vocational stressor for deeply troubled clergy is a sense they cannot do anything else. They may stay in the stress out of a deep commitment to Christ and the Church (Zondag 312-13). In many, if not most other, professions, persons who are not satisfied with their work are more likely to seek other employment. The commitment of clergy to stay may keep dissatisfied clergy in an unhealthy place.

Clergy also face a number of tasks in an ordinary day. Multitasking may well be a fact in the current American workday world. For clergy it appears to be more of a fact than a choice. In their research on pastoral work activities, Gary William Kuhne and Joe F. Donaldson found that the brevity and number of activities in the pastor’s workday was a stressor. While the pastor is reading in preparation for a sermon, the phone rings, a knock at the study door indicates a person is waiting to speak with the pastor as soon as the phone call is completed. While the visitor is in the pastor’s study, the secretary pages her or him as a reminder of an appointment at another location. The brevity and number of contacts in a day are constant interruptions to healthy reflection. This time

fragmentation seems to work against exercising the reflective activities necessary to improve professional practice (160).

Additional stress for clergy comes from a lack of role clarity. The sense that the pastor is always accessible and available can interfere with family time. It can also interrupt family systems. Salvador Minuchin in the area of boundaries for healthy family systems says:

The function of boundaries is to protect the differentiation of the system. Every family subsystem has specific functions and makes specific demands on its members; and the development of interpersonal skills achieved in these subsystems is predicated on the subsystem's freedom from interference by other subsystems.... For proper family functioning, the boundaries of subsystems must be clear. They must be defined well enough to allow subsystem members to carry out their functions without undue interference, but they must allow contact between the members of the subsystem and others. (53-54)

Lee continues by identifying the intrusiveness of congregational demands on the lives of clergy and their families. The inability to separate is similar to the research of Kuhne and Donaldson in the area of separation for reflection. For Lee the problem is separation for good family time (479).

Psychological Factors

A personal interview with Dr. James Gebhart involved a conversation about depression, in general, and clergy specifically. Dr. Gebhart is a psychotherapist in private practice in Columbus, Ohio. He entered this practice after serving as an ordained United Methodist pastor.

In treatment centers, a common practice was for him to walk through the halls with depressed patients. Simply walking was beneficial to the depressed person's sense of well-being. Much of Dr. Gebhart's work is with clergy. He sees a sedentary life as a

contributing factor to depression. For him any exercise will benefit a person's sense of well-being.

Divorce, illness, and other psychological stressors are a part of the lives of clergy. Expectations from parishioners that clergy are immune to these stresses can prevent clergy from seeking the necessary time to return to health. Even seeing the flashing blue lights in the rearview mirror and knowing that a speeding ticket is imminent may add to psychological stress.

Spiritual Factors

Clergy face the same temptations as the members of their parish. The time constraints and pressures that are experienced add to spiritual struggles. Too little time spent in personal study and focusing on maintaining spiritual health can lead to burnout. One main contributing factor to burnout may be lack of adequate sleep (Breck). Andrew R. Irvine adds his thoughts on spiritual causes:

Clergy have been seduced by a world that has slipped into the church demanding measures of success that are quantitatively obvious and descriptively visible. We have accepted that success and even survival is based on competition. It follows in our thinking that this competition implies developing a better product than the church next door. Driven by activism we have forgotten who we are as whole beings. We have killed the self of wholeness to reward the self of success. (107)

For healing from too much stress to take place, clergy need to separate from the availability, accessibility, expectation. Meaningful time for healthy reflection will involve time away from the parish stresses and will mean time away from family members for married clergy.

Balancing One's Life

As previously noted many are the stressors in the lives of clergy. How they deal with these stressors is important to spiritual, physical, and mental health. A hectic schedule may allow some to say they do not have time to do anything about the stress; however, dealing with these stressors begins with some kind of a plan.

Roy M. Oswald, working through the Alban Institute, mentions a schedule for clergy to assist in developing a balanced life. He identifies the unusual schedule for pastors often allowing one day off each week, no restful Sundays, and no long weekends. This schedule means healthy clergy will need consciously to schedule daily, weekly, quarterly, and yearly breaks. The daily schedule might include a time for exercise, non-job-related reading, or a family time. Enjoyable activity is important to achieve Sabbath (121-22).

Because Sunday is the normal Sabbath in our church culture, parishioners follow that scriptural mandate. For clergy who are busy leading worship and other activities on Sunday, it is not a Sabbath day for them, so clergy need to schedule another day in the week for their time of spiritual rest and renewal (123-24).

Because no such things as long weekends exist for clergy, save for taking vacation, Oswald recommends a quarterly long weekend, not counted as vacation. Some choose a three-day retreat, which may not include the weekend, during each quarter of the year. The suggestion provides regular times of renewal and refreshment. Establishing this practice is part of a much larger process for self-care for clergy (Oswald 124-25).

Oswald also includes in the annual plan a time away from the parish when the clergy person is unavailable to the parishioners. A schedule of this nature provides for

arranging for another person or group to provide all the necessary care and to cover the duties of the parish. Time without concern for the business of the parish allows for recreation of one's body and soul (125).

In addition to the annual cycle, Oswald also recommends regular sabbatical times. His suggestion is a three-month sabbatical every four years. He also suggests cycles of regular times apart from the tasks of ministry in addition to the sabbatical model for a good practice of healthy self-care (125-27).

Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck developed A Guide for Ministers and Other Servants to provide one structure for daily time with God to promote spiritual health. This guide also provides structure for a full-day retreat each month (348). The design of this book assists persons, especially clergy, in finding and maintaining spiritual strength for the pastoral ministry journey.

M. Robert Mulholland warns that one size does not fit all for spiritual formation and health. Some set up a program and infer that if one were to follow the prescribed steps she or he will find the health and strength for pastoral ministry. Mulholland shares a reminder for seeking therapeutic assistance when indicated. For him health is not spiritual or psychological but both spiritual and psychological (159).

Models for Improving Self-Care

Models for improving self-care include clergy led-retreats, visiting retreat centers, and education-based models. In this section, I will discuss these models.

Clergy-Led Retreats

In his dissertation process, John D. Scott developed a one-day retreat to assist clergy in the Marion, Indiana, area. The day was a time for focusing on a fresh sense of

God's call, the pastor's awareness of God's sovereignty and grace, the development of personal fellowship with God, and a discovery of and dependence on the power of God through the Holy Spirit (69-72). The pretest and posttest showed little effect on the participants' sense of well-being. The suggestion from Scott was the duration of the event was likely not long enough to have the desired effect (99).

For his dissertation study, Steven Anton Gerig designed a four-session intervention program that involved meeting four times over a six-month period. The design of the sessions explored burnout in clergy and investigated ways to avoid burnout. Small group settings were used to assist the sixteen participants in their conversations. The benefits of this process were the teaching in the sessions as well as the group process, which provided support for those who were experiencing the greatest sense of burnout (101). The duration of the program and the group building were significant in the positive impact of this intervention model.

Retreat Centers

A number of organizations and programs across the United States have designed time and space for clergy to maintain or regain balance in ministry. With the assistance of the Rev. Doug Lynn, who has visited three of these retreat centers, I have briefly evaluated the centers and resources.

The ministry, The Parsonage, provides a resource for clergy on their website, www.parsonage.org, where one can find assistance in understanding and facing the issues of modern pastoring. The website includes lists of books, articles, and interviews gathered to assist pastors in quickly find help with struggles they may be facing. This site does not offer clergy opportunities away from their pastoral settings (The Parsonage).

Faith Mountain is located in Rosedale, West Virginia. Their stated purpose for existing is, “Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints” (Philem. 1:7, NLT):

With the words Paul wrote to Philemon as a beacon, we endeavor to minister to the needs of pastors, missionaries and Christian families through the gift of helps. It is our desire that Faith Mountain Ministries will be a place of prayer and reflection as those called of God are refreshed by His Spirit through the enjoyment of His creation. (“Vision”)

As a resource, Faith Mountain desires to provide a low-cost time away for clergy and their families.

The Dove Center near Pensacola, Florida, offers clergy who identify themselves as being in crisis a program they call Life Restoration Programs (LPT). The setting is that of a resort on the Gulf Coast of Florida. LPT offers free lodging and counseling at a reasonable cost. Part of their hope is that a safe, restful atmosphere will assist the restoration process. Guests are encouraged to bring laptop computers and cell phones. The design of the program is not to separate them from technology. The nature of this program suggests a stay of ten to fourteen days is necessary to work through the crisis situations (“Life Restoration Programs”).

Pastor Care is a national organization whose goal is to provide support for clergy and clergy families. The support consists of connecting clergy with appropriate counseling, get-away places, interim employment, legal help, healthcare assistance, and prayer. Pastor Care does not offer one specific program; rather, it operates as a clearinghouse to assist clergy in finding and maintaining balance in life and ministry (“About Us”).

Stonegate Sabbatical Ministries is in existence to minister to pastors and their spouses. They use a setting that overlooks Lake Michigan to provide this ministry. The Sabbatical Ministry is a five-day time apart for clergy and spouses. The design is to move couples toward more prayer time together. The five-day sabbatical is a time away from the ministry setting and an attempt to nurture relationships with God for both clergy and spouses (“Sabbatical”).

Pastor’s Retreat Network provides five-day retreats for pastors and pastoral couples. The retreat setting is a time of separation from the technology of culture. No telephones, televisions, calendars, or other common demands of daily living are available. One of the goals is to provide a quality of time in a refreshing atmosphere. These three retreat centers are in the following locations: Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin. Retreats are by invitation only. One receives an invitation through an application process. The goal of providing a place away from the technology the world offers is one of the strong suits of this ministry (“General Information”).

All these ministries are beginning opportunities for clergy, and sometimes their spouses, to receive a break from the pace of ministry. The beauty of the settings and opportunity to interact with nature/creation is a recurring theme. Positions such as the beautiful Gulf of Mexico, Lake Michigan, 250 acres for walking, a pond to enjoy share a common theme of the benefit of experiencing God in creation.

The mention in the material of the Pastor’s Retreat Network of no phones, televisions, calendars, or common interruptions of daily life says that others see the benefit of separation from the technology of today (“General Information”). The offer of

a simpler life with fewer distractions is drawing clergy to their retreat centers. Providing places for this separation is one of the goals of this project.

Education-Based Model

One of the offerings from the Alban Institute is a program designed to assist clergy in “getting a fix on one’s ministry.” Among the assessment tools used as a part of this seminar is managing physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health. The context of the seminar is a conference center not separated from any of the available technology. Alban Institute offers numerous training opportunities for clergy. Currently there are no workshops fitting the theme of this paper listed in the Alban Institute’s courses offered (“Alban Seminars”).

Caring for the Physical

An increasing number of writers are beginning to look at physical health in the Christian community. Adding this area to the more traditional spiritual practices helps to focus on the whole person (Rediger 31-32; Shucksmith 158; see also Slaughter). These looks at health involve regular exercise, weight control, and spiritual retreats.

Barry Shucksmith argues that the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 4:7-8 refers to athletic physical exercise:

Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives’ tales. Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important, for it promises a reward in both this life and the next. (1 Tim 4:7-8, Shucksmith 158)

The focus on physical training highlights the importance of the body and bodily care in the writings of Paul (158). Nevertheless, for clergy the emphasis on the spiritual exercise may take precedence. The sense is that time with God is more important than time caring

for the physical temple in which one lives. I have heard again and again that time is not available for exercise; tasks that are more important are at hand (i.e., prayer and study).

Kenneth F. Ferraro finds that “there is no evidence in these data that religion plays a major role in aiding the management of body weight in the United States” (238). Data collected for this study points to unhealthy practices. In fact, Ferraro’s finding is those who practice religion in the United States have a tendency to be overweight. The biblical teaching concerning treating our bodies as temples of God agrees with his concerns (see 1 Cor. 6:19).

Outdoor Education

Many studies have addressed the positive effect of being outdoors. Programs such as Outward Bound provide outdoor adventure programs designed to develop teamwork, personal confidence, and a sense of well-being. The bases for physical programs to improve the person go back at least to Plato (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, Richards 43).

In her dissertation study, April Lee Roberts found that simply being in “nature” had a positive effect on participants in outdoor adventures. Her research states simply the benefit in “being away.” Being away involves separation from normal activities and experiencing nature has a restorative effect on the person who is away (11).

Studies of Outward Bound adventures list various positive effects on the participants. John Hattie, H. W. March, James T. Neill, and Garry E. Richards researched a number of studies on these effects. Among their findings is the effect of outdoor adventure programs on long-term gains. There is not enough information to say why adventure programs are effective. The research, however, says that the positive effect of adventure programs continues to benefit participants after the events are completed. In

events where a follow-up assessment was completed, short-term gains in self-concept, locus of control, and leadership continued to improve between the end of the program and the follow-up (43).

Marlis Mang cites the restorative effects of wilderness backpacking. The benefits of wilderness backpacking on mental restoration were higher than for persons who had been on vacation that did not include wilderness backpacking. He notes that in the area of emotional well-being the area of happiness in general was significantly improved. This research did not show spiritual restoration as a benefit of the wilderness experiences, but he admits the post testing situations may have masked any benefits (Abstract).

In his doctoral study for the University of New Mexico, William James Griffin, Jr. attempted to ascertain the Christian spiritual impact of a wilderness excursion where specific Christian teaching was a part of the experience. His study of sixteen through twenty-year-olds found that the participants in this adventure showed significant increase in their beliefs after this adventure (Abstract).

James Richard Lunke, Jr. studied the psychological benefits of backpacking. He expected to find value to wilderness adventure; I share the same conviction. His findings support the thesis that leaving the trappings of civilization behind helped the participants to improve self-reliance and reliance on the small group of fellow travelers (Abstract).

Christian camping experiences also speak to the benefit of surrounding oneself with God's creation. Camping with teenagers has been the focus of much of Donald M. Joy's work. He has noticed a pattern of trust building in camping situations. The minimum time necessary in building community is four days of camping (111). He has also seen a pattern of as many hours of meeting as equal to the number of participants in

a group of seminary students for the group to build a trust relationship. This means that for a group of five students to find this trust relationship, it involves meeting for five one hour sessions. After the initial time, trust built on a community model requires continued time and a firm commitment. He notes unaccountable absences limit trust building (111-12). One benefit of camping experiences is the time spent in community and trust building.

Stephen F. Venable and Joy offer a further study of Christian camping specifically as backpacking. They list values of backpacking for teenagers. In backpack camping, participants share in a sense of pilgrimage. Each day's agenda unfolds with challenges and possibly danger. Also the participants are reminded of being in a different place each day. Being on the trail also offers opportunity to bear one another's burdens, live with just the bare necessities, and learn that survival is possible (104-05). April Lee Roberts' suggestions from her study agree with the above-mentioned benefits of excursion backpacking trips. She also lists development of life-long friendships and trust in self and others as benefits (272).

In attempts to find backpacking events for clergy, I searched Outward Bound, Shalem Institute, and Alban Institute. I also communicated by e-mail to see if any such events exist or have been conducted. In a search of the Outward Bound Web site, I was not able to find even one documented study of clergy groups in wilderness backpacking excursions (Outward Bound). I also conducted e-mail conversations with persons at Shalem Institute and the Alban Institute (Leproni; Greer). None of these groups is aware of backpacking retreat models for clergy. As previously studies of youth and young adults in Christian settings exist.

Conclusion

Having listed a number of stressors in the lives of clergy, the purpose of this study was to offer one more source for dealing with some stressors. The current climate for many clergy is one where focus on personal spiritual health is difficult due to common distractions of life. Interruptions during the day, parishioners who have developed unrealistic expectations and the clergy person's desire to meet these expectations, sexual ethics concerns, to name a few, cause difficulty for many members of the clergy to maintain good self-care practices.

Outdoor education models say that being away from the normal day-to-day activities of lives provides opportunity for persons to relax and heal. The design of this study was to provide events that allowed clergy the opportunity for separation and opportunity to relax and heal. An energetic excursion into God's less spoiled creation offered time away and time well spent.

I have designed these ministry intervention events as opportunities for overriding the stress cycles of the participants, for spiritual growth leading clergy, and for moving toward healthy patterns of self-care. Building a practice of regular time separated from the confusion and distractions of life in a setting that promotes experiencing the presence of the living God is hopeful. The literature suggests that improved spiritual health is both possible and advisable.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

Clergy find themselves more and more accessible to congregation members in the current culture. The advent of mobile phones, Internet connections, and e-mail make pastors accessible no matter where they are. This accessibility can lead to a sense that clergy should always be available. This pattern can make spiritual retreat and renewal difficult. Separating from this connectedness can also be traumatic for pastors who believe that being available is part of their duty. Providing a way for clergy to separate from this accessibility through backcountry excursions may provide a way for clergy to separate from the stress of constant availability and provide better access to spiritual renewal.

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the effect of a three-day clergy excursion backpacking experience for its ability to increase the self-selected volunteers sense of spiritual health and well-being as they reconnected with God. The three-day experience was a time away from cell phones and computer access to measure the effect of this separation on spiritual well-being. The study also looked at responses of the participants in the areas of desiring to establish healthier self-care practices and boundaries.

Research Questions

The statement of this study calls for evaluation of the effects of three-day excursion backpacking experiences for clergy. These research questions assisted in evaluating this impact.

Research Question #1

In what ways were participants experiencing the four stressors—bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, or spiritual causes of stress as identified by Rowland Croucher—prior to leaving on the three-day excursion ministry intervention retreats?

The pre-event questionnaire and interview assisted me in identifying the stressors in the lives of the participants in this ministry intervention. Categorizing the stressors was done using the four stressors—bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, or spiritual causes of stress.

Research Question #2

How did the participants experience the three-day excursion?

Being away from telephones, television, e-mail, and the Internet can be difficult for persons who regularly connect to parishioners and family members in so many ways. The importance of time away from these beneficial but oftentimes distracting media allows for authentic contact with the presence of God. Observation and response in the journals assisted in drawing conclusions about the benefit of time separated from the technology of today. I used the post-event interview to understand the experiences of the participants.

Research Question #3

What impact did the three-day backcountry retreat demonstrate on aspects of clergy spiritual health in the areas of Croucher's four stressors?

The participants identified the ways this ministry intervention retreat affected their spiritual health because of their participation in this research project. The post-event interview provided the data needed for this evaluation.

Propositions

The research questions guided this study. The propositions listed here are additional goals based on the research, given my four-part theory, that participants who make this excursion will experience.

Proposition #1

Participants will have an exhilarating physical experience. This experience will be physically challenging. The physical challenge will allow a sense of success in the event.

Proposition #2

Participants will find the separation from the accessibility, availability cycle of pastoring to be refreshing. The time away from parish life will provide opportunity for a healthy time of separation.

Proposition #3

Participants will leave with a sense of God's refreshing, renewing power. The sense of God's presence on these excursions will allow participants to experience spiritual renewal.

Proposition #4

Participants will commit to a regular practice of three-day separations for spiritual renewal. The events will be so transforming that participants will have a strong desire to continue the practice of healthy breaks from the stress of parish life.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were nine clergy of various ages and years of pastoral experience. They were willing to challenge themselves physically to see if that challenge was beneficial to their spiritual lives. Nine male clergy participated in the two events. The first week had four participants, and the second week had five.

I recruited the participants and offered to share a retreat with them in the next two years if they found this format for spiritual renewal was beneficial to them. Two of the participants had been on backpacking events with me last fall. The others were acquaintances who agreed to be part of this research project.

These participants were willing to participate in this adventure and stretch their comfort levels.

Design of the Study

The design for this project followed the Participant Observation model. I led two events, each consisting of a three-day, two-night duration. Each participant completed both a pre-event and post-event interview. Both interviews followed a prepared questionnaire with follow-up questions for clarification and additional information.

Roberts suggests that the following outcomes may be expected from an excursion such as this one: self-confidence, self-esteem, durability, physical competence, technical competence, inventiveness, development of life long friendships, trust in self, trust in other, and the development of unique spiritual practices (272). As part of the participant-observation study, I took care to see if these possible outcomes were observed.

Data Collection

The participants kept a journal during this event. The journaling had a guided component of questions included in Appendix A.

I kept a participant-observation modeled field journal to keep record of my observations of the experiences of the participants. I carefully recorded the uncontrollable variables. I paid careful attention to weather conditions, relationships, problems with equipment, and possible injuries.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I have protected the anonymity of the participants in this dissertation. No names are included in this study. The documentation provided participants opportunity to hide their identity. For the journaling, participants shared information in their journals by answering the post-event questionnaire and follow up interview. I shared nothing in the dissertation that does not have the explicit permission of the participant. I did not use the participants' names in the development of this project. I refer to participants only by a number.

Administration of Interviews

The questions found in Appendix C provided me opportunity to gather information on each participant before the excursions. The information from the interviews provided a baseline to evaluate the response of each participant.

Ten days after the conclusion of the event, the follow-up interviews began, and I completed the interviews by day fourteen. This interview was open-ended getting responses to the research questions.

Variables

The independent variable of this research project was the excursion backpacking retreat. Participation in the Bible Study curriculum found in Appendix E as well as pre-event, during the event, and post-event journaling provided each participant with similar experiences on the excursion.

I controlled the difficulty, length, and duration of the excursion to offer the best possible experience for each participant. When weather affected Day 2 of the second event, I altered the course to insure time to reach the second night's campsite. I offered assistance and encouragement to provide maximum benefit for this experience.

The dependent variable was the spiritual well-being of each participant. I used the pre-event questionnaire and interview to evaluate the well-being of the participants.

Data Analysis

I gathered data for this project by questionnaires and interviews. Each participant completed both pre-event and post-event questionnaires and follow-up interviews for each. I also kept a field journal to keep track of my observations during the events. I paid careful attention to the responses of each participant.

I paid attention to age, years in ministry, and existing practices of self-care of the participants in the evaluation of the data. I gathered information during the daily hikes; around the tasks of preparing campsites, meals, and cleanups; and, during group conversations and with individual contacts with the participants during the three-day experience.

In the gathering of information, I used the pre-event questionnaires to get initial responses from each individual. I received the responses by e-mail as Word documents.

After receiving the responses, I scheduled a follow-up interview with each participant. To enhance the information in the questionnaire answers, I asked open-ended follow-up questions. I was careful to respond to the participant and attempted to allow each participant's responses to guide me in the gathering of more complete information. My intent was to allow each participant to share responses without influencing the answers.

After gathering the information, I sorted the responses dealing with stressors to find the number and frequency of identified stressors. With the information I gathered in the pre-event interview, I listed the stressors identified in each participant's responses using the four categories identified by Croucher: vocational, bio-ecological, psychological, and spiritual.

I followed a similar process for evaluating the information gathered in the post-event questionnaires and follow-up interviews. I sent the questionnaire to each of the participants. Each participant completed the questionnaire and e-mailed their responses to me. I scheduled a time for the follow-up interview. Before the interview, I asked the interviewee to refresh his memory of the experience by reading his journal entries from his ministry intervention event. I used the answers on the questionnaire to guide my questioning. To assist myself in remaining neutral, I used the propositions to guide my follow-up questions. I checked each response against my field journal.

After compiling the answers from each participant, I spent time with the data to evaluate the participants' responses, looking for common experiences shared or contradictions. Chapter 4 shares the data discovered in this process.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The practice of self-care by clergy takes many forms of retreat and renewal. This chapter describes another option for self-care as a ministry intervention retreat in the form of excursion backpacking. The purpose of the research was to explore the unfolding dynamics among the participants during a three-day clergy excursion backpacking experience for its ability to increase the participants' sense of spiritual health and well-being as they reconnect with God and spend time away from daily routines.

This chapter begins with a description of the participants. After sharing information about the participants, I follow with responses to the three research questions and four propositions that guided this project.

Profile of Participants

To assist with the evaluation of Research Question #1, I am including the following profile of the participants. In this profile, I show the stressors each participant identified as active in his life prior to the event.

I e-mailed the pre-event and post-event questionnaires to the nine participants. After the participants returned the completed questionnaires, I scheduled and conducted follow-up interviews with each participant. The participants ranged in age from 31 to 57 and in years in full-time parish ministry from two to twenty-eight. All nine of the participants were ordained male clergy. Six of the participants were United Methodist clergy persons serving in the West Ohio Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. One was a minister in the Disciples of Christ denomination, one a member of Southern Baptist Convention, and one a member of the Evangelical Free denomination.

Among the United Methodist participants, three would identify themselves as Conservative/Evangelicals while the other three United Methodist participants would identify themselves as theologically moderate to liberal.

I conducted two independent events. The first event had four participants—three United Methodists and one Southern Baptist. The second event had five participants—three United Methodists, one Disciples of Christ, and one Evangelical Free.

The participants included six clergy from the West Ohio Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Participant #1 has been serving churches for four years and is 31 years old. Participant #2 is 38 and has been serving for seven years. Participant #3 is 51 years old and has been serving for twenty-one years. Participant #4 is 50 and has been serving for twenty years; twelve years were spent in foreign mission service. Participant #5 is 57 years old and has been serving for thirty-one years. Participant #6 is 57 and has been serving for twenty-six years.

The other participants came from three different denominational groups. Participant #7 is a Southern Baptist, age 50, from Central Kentucky. Participant #8 is Church of Christ (Christian), age 51, from Hillsboro, Ohio. Participant #9 is Evangelical Free, age 55, from Hillsboro, Ohio.

The varied ages of the participants and some diversity of the participants' denominational backgrounds offer benefit to the results of this study. Even the theological diversity among the United Methodist participants offers additional research value.

Self-Care Practices of Participants

To assist in evaluating the experiences of the participants, the Pre-event Questionnaire asked about their current self-care practices around regularly taking a day off, regular retreats, vacation time, and exercise regimen. Table 4.1 illustrates their practices in these four areas.

Table 4.1. Self-Care Practices of Clergy Participants.

	Day Off Each Week	Regular Retreats	Regular Vacations	Exercise Regimen
Participant 1	Regular	No	Regular, 2 weeks	No
Participant 2	Not always	No	Regular	Runs
Participant 3	Regular	No	Sporadic	Some walking
Participant 4	Sporadic	No	Regular	Some walking
Participant 5	Usually	Yes, 1-2 times annually	Yes	Walking and Water Aerobics
Participant 6	Yes	Yes, 1 per year	Yes, 3 weeks	Biking and swimming
Participant 7	Yes	No	Yes	Walk, bike, and strength
Participant 8	Every 2 weeks	No	Irregular, 2 weeks	Sporadic
Participant 9	No	No	Regular	Walking with dog

Days Off

The best self-care practices of the nine participants were regularly taking a day off and regularly vacationing. Six of the participants state that they take a protected day off each week. Three of the participants either take no regular day off or are sporadic in this practice.

Vacations

Seven of the participants take regular vacations of two to four weeks annually. Usually the vacations are in one-week increments and scheduled at convenient times for the other family members. Two said they take vacations, but they are not regularly scheduled.

Spiritual Retreats

In the area of spiritual retreats, one participant takes regular retreats of three to five day duration, one takes regular retreats of an overnight duration, and one participant takes occasional retreats. The other six do not practice taking spiritual retreats.

Exercise

The practice of exercise by this group of participants is not encouraging. Only five of the participants practiced regular exercise regimens prior to these ministry intervention events. Three of them are regular enough in their exercise to be considered physically fit. The other two are exercising enough to attempt to maintain their health. Two of the participants do not practice any regular exercise program, and the other two are sporadic in their physical exercise.

Identified Stressors in Participants

The pre-event questionnaire and interview assisted me in identifying the level of stressors in the lives of the participants. I used the four categories identified by Croucher: bio-ecological, vocational, psychological, and spiritual. The participants easily identified a significant area of stress in which they had been involved in the four weeks leading up to their event. The data collected provides the following information in relation to Research Question #1: In what ways were participants experiencing the four stressors—

bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, or spiritual causes of stress as identified by Rowland Croucher—prior to leaving on the three-day excursion ministry intervention retreats?

Stressors Identified by Individual Participants

All nine of the participants identified a significant event that fit in at least two of the categories. Three of the participants identified a significant event and surrounding stressors that fit in all four of these categories. One participant identified a stressor that identified three of the categories of stress.

Bio-Ecological Stressors

In the category of bio-ecological, four of the participants identified stress concerns. One participant had significant heart muscle issues and three stents in heart arteries. His desire to participate in an excursion-backpacking event brought him excitement but also caused concerns because of his health issues. Another participant struggled with his weight. Being over-weight in itself causes additional stress, and his tendency to deal with stress by eating contributes to other areas of stress. A third participant identified a sudden demand on time as a significant stress. The number of congregation members dealing with serious health issues in addition to the normal schedule of preparation for Sunday and necessary meetings were causing a time crunch. He even identified scheduling to be gone for this event as a stressor; however, looking forward to this event also offered hope for a time of refreshment and spiritual renewal. The fourth participant to identify with stressors in this area shared more after the event than in preparation. He was dealing with a major life issue and being able to make what he sees as healthy life choices.

Vocational Stressors

All nine of the participants identified the vocational area of stress. For the United Methodist participants, stress was heightened because early fall is a time of establishing budgets, nominating leaders, and establishing clergy salaries for the following year. Each of them identified preparation for the annual Charge Conference as a source of stress. Each participant also identified the need to separate from the role of pastor and have time for personal growth and development. Struggles with expectations of congregation members and family members were tugging at their hearts. One important decision identified was to take time for spiritual retreat, but it was also identified as a difficult decision because of the sensed pressures of their ministries. One participant is the first pastor of a congregation created by the merger of two congregations. Members there are dealing with loss of identity and some have shared their anger. He received the anger and has to remember that he is the recipient not the one who caused of the loss of identity. In addition, he was struggling with family relationships and general stress of life, and he needs to find a way to remain grounded.

Psychological Stressors

Seven of the participants identified psychological stressors. Psychological stress ranged from having what the culture identifies as a significant birthday (fifty) to being the child who has to make decisions for a parent. Birthdays may not seem that significant; however, when a birthday signifies moving to a new area of life, it will involve decisions of job placement and retirement plans. Another participant identified a tendency to put off work until a crisis time arrives. Procrastination around meeting a deadline for publishing an article heightened his stress. Here again is another area of stress for the

United Methodist participants who were preparing for their Charge Conference meetings. The pressure to complete the information for those meetings meant additional work on already busy calendars. Preparation for Charge Conference would be one example of a vocational stressor also being a psychological stressor. One participant was in the process of going through his first professional evaluation. For him, the vocational challenges enhanced his psychological stress. Questions around expectation and performance were challenging not only to job security but also to personal well-being.

Spiritual Stressors

Seven of the participants identified the area of spiritual stressors. The double-edged nature of this stressor is that it can include dealing with personal stress or can be the result of dealing with spiritual problems in their congregations. One area of identified stress was the weekly preparation to lead worship. When participants identified weekly preparation as a stressor, they identified experiencing stress in all four areas. Stress could be finding/making the time to prepare. It could be finding the time to pray and center oneself. It could be concern for how members of the congregation would respond to a tough topic. One of the participants shared a significant sexual struggle, but he did not share with me until after the event. This struggle was causing him serious concerns in all four of these stressors. The sense for him that it was at the root a spiritual struggle made his anguish even more difficult. In the responses of other participants, their spiritual struggles also reached to vocational stress. For instance, members of the parish may perceive spiritual struggles as weakness in character leading to vocational uncertainty.

My personal experience with these stressors and the literature dealing with stress in the lives of clergy predicted that I would find significant areas of stress in the lives of

this group of nine clergy. The information shared above, with one exception, only deals with stress identified in the four weeks leading up to the events in this ministry intervention project. Conversations on the events and in follow-up interviews identified stresses of this nature as common in the lives of this group of clergy (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Stressors Identified by Individual Participants

	Bio-Ecological	Vocational	Psychological	Spiritual
Participant 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 4	Yes	Yes	No	No
Participant 5	No	Yes	No	Yes
Participant 6	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 7	No	Yes	Yes	No
Participant 8	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 9	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Experience of the Events

As each ministry intervention event progressed, I carefully watched the dynamics of the participants. The first thing I tracked was the participants' ability to disengage from everyday life. As we traveled to our event beginning, I noticed a level of disengagement and team building was taking place. However, when we locked the cell phones in the cars, the real separation began.

A reporting of the unfolding of the events allows a look at the dynamics leading to the response to Research Question #2: How did the participants experience the three-day excursion?

Each week had specific dynamics unique to the group. The first week consisted of four participants in addition to myself. The second week had five participants in addition to myself. The group with a total of six travelers made for a more comfortable excursion.

Week One

Soon after we were out of the sight of the cars that separation began. For the first half-mile of the excursions we encountered a few people hiking to and from a historic cabin on the trail. Conversations were superficial and light along that part of the hike. After we passed the cabin and were alone on the trail, the conversations became more personal in nature. For the first hour and a half of this day, conversation focused on things “back home” and situations that were on the participants’ minds. When we took our break for lunch, the conversations began to shift. The beauty of the section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was becoming the focus of the conversation.

The struggle of one of the members enhanced the excursion. After we had traveled five of the seven miles of that day’s excursion, it was obvious that if he were going to make the trip he would need help. A stronger, more experienced hiker and I hiked ahead to drop our gear so we could assist the struggling member of our team. About halfway from that point, he dropped his pack while I hiked ahead to our campsite for the night. I dropped my gear at the campsite and returned to help. Two of the participants had teamed to help carry the gear of our struggler and made great progress. The third member joined them, so when I returned to help, they had made great

advancement. From this point, the sense of disengagement from “home” was complete. The group was engaged in the event.

For the next two days, this group talked about life, camping experiences in younger days, and church camping experiences, and gained comfort on the trail. I enjoyed hearing the metaphors of the travels. One mentioned the rocky path and conversation moved to the metaphor of rocky soils and more fertile ground. After bathing in the stream near the second evening’s campsite, a participant made reference to Namaan and his cleansing from leprosy.

One observation for me is that clergy may separate from home, but they are still clergy and scriptural metaphors surround much of their conversation and thinking. In this sense, the conversation was a healthy acknowledgement of God’s presence in the moments of the excursion.

The second day offered a high level of comfort on the trail, and the hike out on day three was physically demanding yet refreshing, as now we were all veterans of excursion backpacking. Each participant shared the sense of accomplishment. The sense was higher for the three with little or no experience on the trail.

Day 2 was more comfortable in all aspects of the travel. One of the participants was journaling more than did the others. He felt comfortable staying back to write because he knew that we would take a break soon, and he would rejoin us. The three stronger members and I were carrying part of the gear for our struggling member. His lighter load allowed him to keep a better pace.

As we sat around the campfire on day 2, laughter and a sense of accomplishment filled the conversation. The physical nature of the excursion offered a new stress in the

lives of the participants. Fatigue was the new stress, but the consensus was that it was a good stress. We had forgotten the stresses of church in the tiredness of our bodies for the rejuvenation of having accomplished two good days of hiking.

The final day was one of moving toward home. After packing our gear and starting on the trip out, the conversations began to be of home. As I hiked with one of the participants, he took me a bit by surprise as he said, “This time is more than disengaging for me. I have reengaged with creation and am more comfortable with myself.” That moment was life changing for him and for me.

Part of the reason for routing the trip the way I did was to pass a beautiful waterfall on the way out. We arrived at Abram’s Falls and were the only persons there for a few moments, and then the world entered back as thirty middle school aged children joined us. The rest of that day’s hike was a time of reengaging with the world where we live most of our days. Yet moving back into our everyday world carried a fresh sense of joy.

Some of the new insights from this event follow:

1. “Ministry is not a walk, it is an excursion.”
2. “Where we are is where we are.”
3. “We are on a journey.”
4. “God is always on our journeys.”
5. “We cannot live without time in ‘sojourn,’ detours into the ‘wild.’ The domestic part of life is OK, but we can’t thrive without time in the wilderness.”
6. “We sell ourselves short when we say, ‘I can’t, or I could never.’ When we set out on excursion and ‘do it,’ there is empowerment.”

The responses of this group of participants moved me. Their openness to the experience encouraged me to complete the study.

Week Two

The second week shared similarities with week one, but it was a unique week as the group formed around a different group size. As we left our cars, the weather forecast for the night added anxiety because of the possibility of significant rainfall on our first night out. We began the hike in a light rain.

As in the first week in the first half mile, we encountered a few hikers who were visiting the cabin on our way. After we passed the cabin, the conversations shifted and became more personal. We had one hiker who moved a bit more slowly than the others did. The impressive thing about this group was that different members would choose to take a leg of the trail to stay at the slower pace with the slower member of our excursion.

The younger member of this group was asking questions and seeking mature guidance to life in ordained ministry. Different members of the group would also choose to walk with him for a section of the day's hike.

The separation from home was complete by the time we sat down for lunch. From that time on, conversations shifted to the experience of being on a trail, carrying heavy gear, and getting to know the other participants.

After arriving at camp and sharing our meal, the rains began to fall a bit heavier. We crawled into our tents early and shared conversation through the tents for a few minutes before the fatigue of the day sent us to sleep.

Day 2 provided a big challenge. We could pack our gear in a steady rain or trust the weather forecast from the day before and wait for the rain to stop. We chose the latter,

but we questioned our choice as the rain continued until after 10:00 a.m. However, the rain did stop, and we began our hike for the day.

When we had climbed out of the valley where we had spent night one, we had choices to make. Dampness caused some discomfort with our gear and our clothes. We could hike back to the cars and end our excursion, we could do the full planned hike, or we could take an alternative trail that would delete one mile from our hike and get us to our second campsite a bit earlier. The group chose the shorter route but continuation of the experience.

As we traveled that day, we saw the damage of the storm we had experienced the night before. Being in a deep valley, we did not feel the strong winds that had passed over us as we camped. The damage had put trees across our path, and we needed to move some of the debris to complete our hike.

When we broke for lunch on day two, we were comfortable with our decision to continue our hike with the change in our path. The conversations moved to sharing metaphors of God's presence with us in times of need. The pace of our travels picked up as members of this team sensed God's protection with us.

At our campsite for this second night, the conversation around the campfire was longer than that of the first week. The inability to sit and process on the first night had given us more to say during this time. The conversation included (1) the cost of a backpack (from a first-time hiker), (2) the stress of the hike replacing the stress back home; (3) feeling good stress, (4) someone was enjoying what he termed his "man"-cation, (5) talk about family camping trips, (6) comfort of day two allowing more time to look around, (7) quitting and going home being OK but developing fight and going on

being significant;, (8) choosing not to quit being a model for facing challenges in the future, (9) obstacles offering the opportunity to problem solve, and (10) the surrounding sounds offering comfort.

This group was enjoying the victories of the excursion. Separation from daily stress was allowing for renewal.

As we hiked out on day three, the fact that we were the only ones on the trail was apparent. When we arrived at Abram's Falls, we were alone. As we continued our hike past the falls, we encountered significant storm damage and needed to open sections of the trail by clearing debris. When we arrived at our cars, no one was around, and the Cades Cove area is usually a very busy part of the park in October. At the restrooms, a park maintenance man greeted us. He told about the storm on Monday night and what we had lived through. The storm of Monday night had been one with ninety mile-an-hour winds, and we had not felt them. We had a heightened sense of God's protection as we learned of the safety we had experienced.

As we processed our experiences over lunch, we celebrated the sense of protection we had enjoyed. Traveling out of the park, we saw much damage to trees and closed roads. When we could move on, the talk was about the renewal of the trip and the benefit of time in this kind of setting, the wilderness.

Some insights gathered from this event were:

1. "God's protection is amazing."
2. "It was a good time with fellow travelers."
3. "There was lots of good talk on the trail."
4. "Wow, I did it."

5. “Passover will have new meaning for us.”

The excursion was a powerful time with God. When we completed our trip, we came to the full understanding of the protection we had experienced.

The Experience

In establishing the propositions, I set what I believed to be high expectations. This section reports my findings based on the experience of the events.

An Exhilarating Physical Experience

The first was the experience would provide an exhilarating physical experience or challenge. I knew the terrain of the trails we used, so I knew the possibility for this experience. During the events and following the events, each participant mentioned the sense of exhilaration from participating. The physical nature of the event allowed for each to sense his conquering the elements and a joy in completing the excursion.

Each participant had moments of near or complete exhaustion. In those moments, a break was taken allowing for gaining enough energy for the next piece of the trek. Conversations during the breaks and in the evening shared the sense of natural high from exertion. During the shared meal at the end of each event, participants shared their excitement of having completed a strenuous journey. They were exhilarated.

Value of Separation

One part of the experience of the event was the opportunity to separate from the role of pastor. I noticed that by nature conversations often included talk about the being a pastor; however, what was happening back home was rarely mentioned in the conversation. In the liminal sense of being separated from the day-to-day and being betwixt-and-between, participants did break the accessibility, availability cycle.

Participants took the opportunity to focus on the task at hand. In these events, the task at hand was either putting one foot in front of the other, getting clean water, setting up camp, or other related needs.

As we processed the events over our closing meal, each participant mentioned his sense of renewal from the experience of the excursion. The time away from the day-to-day pastoral activities did allow for healthy separation. The value of this time of separation was a model for Sabbath for future separations.

Refreshed by God

The exhilaration of physically challenging excursion and a time of separation offered time for renewal. The focus of the event was spending time away from normal activities for renewal. In being renewed, the time in journey offered a sense of refreshment. Again, the participants in the two events shared a sense of being in God's presence. Each participant was appreciative of a time away from routine and a time to focus on renewal. Even the physical exhaustion of the excursions did not dampen the enthusiasm the participants felt at the completion of the journey. The discussion around the table during our meals was energetic. Each participant shared his excitement.

During our final conversation of the event, each member of the excursions mentioned his sense of renewal in God. They had a new energy for their return to the normal day-to-day routines and were committing to regular times of separation to seek the renewal of their events.

Impact on Spiritual Health

The events had impacts on all four areas of stressors identified by Croucher. This section addresses the various areas of stress and the responses of the participants. The

reporting in this section is in response to the final research question: What impact did the three-day backcountry retreat demonstrate on aspects of clergy spiritual health in the areas of Croucher's four stressors? I also answer the fourth proposition: Participants in the ministry intervention will commit to a regular practice of three-day separations for spiritual renewal.

Bio-Ecological

The participants had good response to the bio-ecological stresses in their lives. For some their event was a healthy way of dealing with stress. The separation from the stress allowed time to separate and renew. It allows one to be healthy in one's skin.

The sense of journey in the events allows time to assess one's general health. One result was a desire for improved physical health and fitness. It also helped to create a desire to make time for physical renewal.

The makeup of the events allowed for the participating male clergy to step outside of normal stress and have a time of comfort. The events were times viewed as helpful for dealing with stress related to gender.

Vocational

The time spent in this event offered a few good vocational results. It was a time when the fear of losing a job or friends was absent. The separation was helpful as it provided a situation where there were no vocational evaluations. The events offered a time of separation from the duties of vocation but not a separation from the identity of being clergy.

One participant listed finding focus for dealing with difficult, dreary people and finding strength for moving forward. Another finds that taking what he is given and looking for healthy ways to deal with the situation is helpful.

Psychological

In the areas of psychologically dealing with stress, participants identified their time in the events as a healthy way of dealing with stress. The events offered the participants an ability to develop confidence in their ability to live on the trail. The confidence on the trail transferred to additional confidence in situations at home. With the confidence experienced here, one participant listed an ability to remain relaxed after returning from the excursion. A young son asked one if he had been to happy school because he noticed a special relaxation in his dad.

The excursion offered one participant the opportunity to face his fair-weather nature. The challenges of rain and storm on his week offered him the chance to fight through his tendency to quit and instead to choose to forge through the challenge.

Spiritual Benefits and New Commitments

Each of the participants had a sense of Sabbath on the event. The excursions were a time for spiritual renewal and refreshment. The events were times to check out of normal routine and to check in with God. The atmosphere of the event was especially helpful. Participants were totally separated from the technological distractions of today's generation and able to commune with God in meaningful ways.

One participant mentioned being able to look behind the events to find God. Being able to find God after a storm was helpful.

A moment of learning for three of the participants is that God can be found in moments. The Sabbath does not have to be a day. One can find Sabbath in a midday break or a half-hour hike. The ability to find communion with God in brief times is also renewing.

The events also left participants with a healthy sense of journey with God. The metaphor of being on a trail, on excursion, offers the opportunity to see daily activities as times of journey with God.

Summary of Findings

Participants in both events shared experiences and benefits leading to improved sense of well-being. The opportunity to leave the daily stressors behind offered opportunities for new ways of facing stress.

Replacing normal stress with physical challenges allows for spiritual renewal. The metaphor of journey can also offer time for separating from daily stress and spending time with God.

Excursion backpacking is a model for clergy spiritual retreat. The time away is not just retreat. It is also time away from the technological gadgets clergy use as tools but are also, at times, distractions: phones, cell phones, computers, and televisions.

Each participant reported similar effects in the areas of improved spiritual well-being after being a part of one of the ministry intervention excursions. Age and years in parish ministry were not factors in the experience.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to explore the unfolding dynamics among the participants during a three-day clergy excursion backpacking experience for its ability to increase the participants' sense of spiritual health and well-being as they reconnect with God and spend time away from daily routines.

This study grew out of my personal quest for meaningful spiritual retreat. The benefit of leaving the parish and experiencing God in the less spoiled environment of excursion backpacking is a passion for me. My desire to share this experience with others was the impetus for this study. Because I receive such a sense of spiritual and physical well-being from spending time journeying on the trail, I believed God would touch others willing to explore creation in similar ways.

Further, this study grew out of concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of clergy in this generation. The general lack of health for clergy in America leads me to seek alternative retreat models to emphasize the need for physical health as a part of total health (Everett). The physical aspect of backcountry excursion backpacking offers challenge to persons of all fitness levels. They are less challenging for the physically fit, but challenging for every participant. For persons who are overweight and generally not physically fit, events such as this may encourage physical fitness.

This study shows excursion backpacking retreats to be useful interventions with clergy. The responses of the participants in the two events conducted in October 2006 in the Cades Cove region of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park suggest value to this

kind of event (Roberts). As Roberts suggests, participants gained self-confidence, trust in self and others, physical and technical competence, and lifelong friendships.

The literature says little or no time on the trail is necessary to separate from normal activity and be engaged in the excursion (Roberts 272). The participants in this study concur with the literature. The literature also suggests journeying with a focus on being with God is a pilgrimage (P. Brown; Augustine). The sense of pilgrimage as the participants communed with God on the trail was easy to observe. The scriptural metaphors shared on the journey also spoke to the spiritual pilgrimage nature of these events.

More specifically, Venable and Joy speak to the pilgrimage nature of backpacking (104-05). In the two events of this study, participants were on pilgrimage. They were not pilgrimages to a specific “holy” site. They were a journey to connect with God. As we journeyed, one of the questions was, “Where are we?” The trails we traveled do not have markings to tell hikers how far they have traveled, so one does not know exactly where one is on the trails. My response was, “We are where we are.” As we continued to travel, “We are where we are,” became a part of the traveling. The participants did not need to know exactly where we were. It was enough to know that we were traveling to a destination, a campsite or back to our cars. Traveling became a metaphor for walking with God and seeking God in the midst of daily activities. One’s excursion becomes traveling on the Christian journey as shared by St. Augustine (21).

As we journeyed, we found the physical and spiritual to be interconnected. The journeys of these excursions were of leaving home and spending time in a new, temporary home (P. Brown 69-70). We were on a physical journey while seeking to be

renewed by the presence of God. I watched as the participants engaged one another in conversations. They talked of their surroundings. They talked about their families. They spoke of their sense of God's presence all around. No matter how physically tired they were, the participants always sensed God's presence. Repeatedly conversation focused on the beauty of God's creation.

As we traveled on this pilgrimage, I was surprised at how the participants grew to trust one another. In Joy's studies of teenage campers on the trail and of seminary students in lunch groups, he discovered that spontaneously expressing trust in Jesus does not develop before day four of a camping experience, or a lunch group had met a number of one-hour sessions equal to the number of participants (111-12). Our time was intense. We had conversations as a total group at each break whether it was for rest or for food. We spent time talking as we traveled. The conversations were usually in subgroups. The level of trust among the members of both groups was higher than would be expected in Joy's studies. However, a compression of time added to the nature of the conversations. One group of five and another group of six could have been at the hour per person investment more quickly than a group of twelve meeting an hour per week. In addition, the extra day of travel to the events offered time for trust building. The team building did not begin at the start of the excursions. It began as members of the group gathered to travel to our lodgings for the night before the start of the events.

I believe the settings of these events provided for trust earlier than suggested. The profession of the participants may also have allowed for quicker trust. If the participants in this study are male clergy of integrity, and they were, they might expect the other male clergy with whom they travel also to be men of integrity. I did not ask the participants

why they built trust with one another so quickly; however, the conversations and responses to the post-event questionnaires and interviews indicate a high level of trust among the participants by lunch of Day 2.

Part of the conversation along the trail was about the ministry. One quoted what he had heard as an analogy about the journey of ministry: “We have heard that ministry is not a sprint but a marathon. After this trip, I say that ministry is not a marathon but an excursion. It is important to walk with God.” The sense of excursion as a focus for ministry allows for movement toward God each day or at least on a regular basis. The study of Abraham presented in Chapter 2 suggests this excursion model for following God. Abraham left the familiar behind as we did. The goal of his travel was intentionally unclear, we only knew approximately where we were, unless we were at a marked intersection or our campsite. The excursions of this study allowed for an experience of faith likened to that of Abraham (Skinner 243). Abraham did not have a stated destination for following God. He was to go where God led. Our journey had destinations, but we were more on a pilgrimage to God than to a campsite.

Participants who were open to experiencing God in a new and different way were necessary to do this research project. I was blessed with nine pastors who were willing to stretch themselves and who shared openness to experiencing God. The participants knew these events would challenge them physically. They accepted the challenge and journeyed to renewed energy for ministry.

Major Findings

The results of this study show that the participants in the two excursion ministry intervention projects experienced significantly positive experiences. The ability of the

participants to separate from the stressors in their parish lives allowed them time for renewal and encounter with God in healthy and helpful ways. This study shows that even a three-day respite from the routines and distractions of daily ministry stress is a good experience and sets a good model for self-care and improved health.

Response to the Events

Separating from the identified stressors allowed for positive experience on the excursion ministry intervention events.

The literature suggests clergy are facing stressors from four areas: bio-ecological, vocational, psychological, and spiritual (Croucher). In this study, each participant identified at least two of these stressors (see Table 4.2, p. 54) mentioned in Croucher's article. The nine participants in the two events of this study share a benefit to their time on these excursions. Their responses to the post-event questionnaire and follow-up interviews show their sense of separation from the stress of their ministries and the time of healing received from the excursions. A look at separation in a liminal sense provides a look behind the benefits. I consciously watched for separation from day-to-day activities, a time betwixt-and-between (Gennep; Turner). The times on these excursion events were a time betwixt-and-between. The activities of the event were totally different from normal day-to-day activities. In order to have safe water to drink, the water had to be pumped through a purifying filter rather than turning on the faucet. Each participant carried his bed (air mattress) and bedding (sleeping bag) in his backpack. Also in the backpack were the food for the entire event, tents for protection from the elements, clothing, and toiletries. The time on excursion was not a normal time in the lives of the participants. We had abandoned the comforts of modern life.

One factor shared by the participants was the physical stress of the excursions. They took all their attention. As they focused on the task at hand, whether putting one foot in front of the other, preparing water or food, or taking a deep breath, they separated from other stressors. The stress of the event was a different stress than what the participants normally experienced. The extent of the physical challenge of the excursion created the new stress. Sharing different stress than normal day-to-day allowed the participants to separate from home and to experience God in the setting of the excursions.

Although not to a holy site, the journey was time of pilgrimage to allow an experience of God's presence. Again, the destination of the excursion was not important. The journeys provided a time of being away from normal activities allowing for separation from stressors in day-to-day life. Opportunity for separation and focus on the surroundings and the activities of the event offered time for experiencing God. Even my experience of God was enriched as I listened to the participants share. Excitement over spotting a small green snake was renewing. Joy and excitement was shared as a bear continued to move away from us. The laughter surrounding the completion of a strenuous part of the trail was invigorating. A participant sharing a metaphor of feeling cleansed from a dip in the creek as Naaman was cleansed as he dipped himself in response to the prophet Elisha's command (2 Kings 5:9), and other metaphors helped us sense God in the midst of our travels.

Value of Replacing Stress

As we sat down for our debriefing lunches at the end of the excursions, the impact of the events was apparent. Participants had accomplished a physically challenging three-day excursion. They had bonded with the other members. They were refreshed and

renewed for the days to come. As predicted in Roberts' study, a high level of self-confidence and self-esteem was evident in the participants (272). The trust in self and others allowed for a deeply emotional sharing of the experience of the events.

A three-day span of time without the distractions of phones, e-mail, or an interruption by an unscheduled visitor was completed (Kuhne and Donaldson 160). The benefit of being away from the normal stresses had allowed for separation and opportunities for spiritual renewal. Rather than the more fractured day filled with interruptions of telephones, unexpected visits from parishioners or salespeople, or even an expected appointment, the three days of these events were entirely focused on the tasks at hand. Being in a situation where the distractions were dealing with weather, seeing a bear or snake, listening to the sounds of a nearby stream, or speaking with one's fellow travelers offered time for reengagement with God. The distractions of the event were welcomed because they enhanced the experience rather than breaking the flow of one's day. They allowed for a sense of being refreshed from time away. As Proposition #2 suggested, finding separation from the accessibility, availability cycle of pastoring would allow Proposition #3 to be fulfilled, that is for God's refreshing, renewing power to touch the participants.

The literature around bio-ecological and psychological stressors predicted the improved sense of psychological well-being in the participants. The events did not offer a time of isolation. In order to be alone, a participant had to choose consciously to separate himself from the group for a time. The participants earned the fatigue of these events by the physical exertion of the excursion (Blanton and Morris 332). Gebhart mentions walking as a healthy way of addressing some symptoms of depression. Having walked

and walked over a period of three days allowed the participants to separate from any depression. The accomplishment of traveling approximately seventeen miles with all the gear necessary for survival allowed each participant to celebrate a significant accomplishment.

Participants shared their appreciation for an event that gave them time to engage with God without interruptions of technology. They enjoyed time away from the pressures of their ministry placements. They had encountered God in ways that would offer times of respite in the days to come. They had accomplished an excursion, a pilgrimage to improved relationship with God.

Model for Spiritual Retreat

Excursion backpacking as spiritual retreat offers an opportunity for clergy to experience God in God's creation. It also offers the opportunity for clergy to separate from distractions commonly found in their lives: cell phones, e-mail, unscheduled visitors, and television. In the natural setting of backcountry camping, the participants carry everything they need on their backs. They carry their food, clothing, bedding, housing, and water purifying equipment. In this experience, the world outside of the experience along with its stressors is left behind for a period of time allowing participants the opportunity to find renewal and recreation.

The retreat models investigated in Chapter 2 are much different from these events. Scott suggests that the duration of his event was not long enough to have much effect on the participants' sense of well-being. Steven Anton Gerig's study was four sessions over a six-month period. He found better results because of the number of sessions and

duration (101). The ministry intervention model of the retreats of this study suggests a three-day event with the intensity of these excursions has value to the participants.

As suggested in the Outward Bound research, participants continue to speak to the benefits of their outdoor adventure experience. Contact with the participants—whether to offer another retreat opportunity or conversation in casual contact—continue to be times of sharing the impact of the event on their lives and ministries (Hattie, March, Neill, and Richards 43). The research suggests following the completion of the events short-term gains continue to grow following the end of the event. I found these events to offer participants this continued growth.

The participants in this research project found this separation to be helpful to their sense of well-being. It was a time for encountering God. They benefited in the areas of physical competence, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Value for Various Ages

The participants in the study ranged in age from 28 to 57 years old. For the youngest participant, the excursion was his first spiritual retreat since completing seminary a little over two years ago. He found the refreshment of the retreat something he wants to replicate throughout his years in ministry.

The oldest of the participants had not been backpacking since his teenage years in Boy Scouts. The experience was one of reconnecting and remembering the joy of time away from the stressors of life.

For each of the participants, the benefit of their time on excursion was easy for them to verbalize. It was time where the sensory response to the surroundings offered

reminders of God who is always with them, God who provides for them, and God who is in the small stuff of life. Age was not a factor in the benefit of the event.

Implications of the Study

Participants experienced the three-day excursions as a healthy, helpful time away from normal stressors. Participants identified themselves as separating from these stressors either as soon as having left their homes or no later than by lunch on day one. All mentioned they had separated from home least by lunch on the first day of their excursion.

The excursions were physically challenging for all of the participants. For some the challenge was very difficult and for others only minor. The physical exertion of even the most physically fit was enough to give a sense of accomplishment at the end of the excursion. The challenge needed to be noticeable by even the most physically fit in each group.

For the least fit in each group, the sense of care from others on the excursion was easy to acknowledge. The group took a “leave no one behind” attitude. If one was struggling physically, other team members stepped up in helpful ways. If a member of the excursion was struggling with a life issue, other members were willing to listen. The excursions were much more helpful to the participants because of the sense of teamwork shared by the participants.

One possible obstacle to participants receiving the full benefit of these excursions was their lack of comfort on the trail. For the five participants who had never carried a backpack for this kind of excursion, anxiety was easy to observe as we began. What gave them the ability to begin the trip was a sense of trust in my knowledge of and enthusiasm

in backpacking. As they engaged with their excursion, they shared their increasing comfort. At least by lunch on day two, the level of comfort identified allowed these participants to enjoy their time away from routine.

The experience shared by all the participants was time away from normal routine and the stressors of life. Taking one step at a time, not knowing exactly where we were (other than on the trail between here and there), and following the guide were challenges enough to allow a time for healing emotionally and growing spiritually. Spending time on a journey provided time for reflection and reconnecting with God's healing presence.

In following the liminal process of separation from familiar things, a time of uncertainty, and a new sense of comfort with a new experience (Turner). I was conscious of these three levels in the participants as we moved through the excursions. As mentioned, the separation from the outside world and normal stressors came quite quickly, by lunch on day one. The sense of discomfort lasted at most until arrival at camp on day two. The new experience was embraced and comfortable at least by the time we arrived at camp on day two. The sense of the new experience was valuable to all the participants.

Limitations and Weaknesses

I studied a sample of nine participants. With this limitation, studies of larger sample or even future studies of similar or smaller numbers may find persons who do not find benefit to excursion backpacking as spiritual retreat. I hold to my contention that willing participants will benefit from events of this nature.

The fact that this study only consisted of two groups limits its effectiveness in predicting the outcomes observed in this study. As this study continues or is replicated,

the outcomes will be expanded and more will be learned about the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of this ministry intervention model.

The duration of this event may be a weakness. The participants saw benefit in a three-day, two-night excursion; however, a desire for a longer event was mentioned. Donald Joy's studies suggest events of at least five-day duration are necessary to see lasting results (Joy 111). The results of this study challenge these findings in this clergy-only context. Further study may help to clarify whether this disproves the five-day rule for clergy only events.

If I were to schedule the event again, I would have made the hike on day one a mile shorter. The amount of time consumed in traveling to the first campsite limited the amount of time for conversation that evening. I wanted the day to be physically challenging, but I did not want it to be too much for the less physically fit members of the excursion.

In this event, I used a prepared biblically based study. I found that the trail was really the curriculum. Conversations around biblical metaphor and parable were enough to provide rich experience. I am unlikely to use a specific study in future events. I will allow the trail to set the curriculum.

Since this was a research project, I did not charge the participants a fee for participation. Most offered to cover at least part of the cost of food, travel, and lodging on the travel day. Possibly the participants felt they owed me something for the experience. I do believe the feedback received was honest; however, the possibility remains that the results are skewed a bit. My prior and on going relationship with the participants may have some effect on my sense of results.

Unexpected Findings

The plan for these ministry intervention events was that they would be three-day and two-night events. The events would begin at the trailhead and finish with a shared meal at a restaurant after the completion of the excursions. What I found was that the events began as the participants traveled to the excursion. Both weeks we traveled in two vehicles and team building began as we gathered for our departure. The team building continued with a shared meal as we traveled to the lodging for the night before we began the excursion. At our place of lodging on Sunday, travel day, also included some preparation. We looked at gear. I suggested things participants might want to leave behind or at least consider leaving. A bit of training in preparation for the excursions took place. This time also contributed to the sense of the events being a day longer than the study suggests. I planned for the shared meal on the morning of the event as a time of preparation, but it was more of a continuation of the team building than I had expected. By the time we began our excursions, more separation from home and a sense of team had taken place than I could have hoped.

I expected that some of the participants would have significant responses to our surroundings. We were out of the normal comforts of our everyday world. No flush toilets for our comfort or water taps for getting clean water were available. We carried our homes (tents), beds (sleeping bags), stoves, food, and clothes on our backs. I did not expect the excitement I observed in the little things. Seeing a pencil-sized green snake, smelling the fresh pine, watching for wild flowers, and hearing the natural sounds surrounding us was exciting to the participants. All of those things are reasons I go

backpacking. It was serendipitous for me to observe how easily the participants experienced excitement in their surroundings.

Even as I am writing this last part of this dissertation, I am receiving feedback from participants. The notes, e-mails, and personal contact with at least five of the nine participants suggest they are both continuing to learn from the impact of their event and to seek times of spiritual renewal because of their experience. I also get feedback from persons who have had contact with participants. The feedback I receive is of the positive impact of the events and a desire to participate in future events. The continuing impact of these events is beyond the scope of this study. The Outward Bound studies suggest benefits will continue to grow. Continued contact beyond the follow-up assessments has allowed for even more input.

As a part of the events, I encouraged the participants to use the Bible study materials found in Appendix E. I provided copies of the Bible study along with space for journaling. In reflecting on the experience of the events, I found that the experience of the trail, the biblical metaphors shared by participants, and the conversation along the trail was rich. On future events, I will allow the trail to provide the curriculum.

Value of the Study Method Used

The use of the participation-observer Model for this study provided opportunity for me to participate fully in the excursions while being the leader. I was careful to do my part in all areas of the experience. I shared the duties along the trail and at the campsites. I spent time hiking with different members of the participating groups. In a sense, I tried to be one of the participants.

Of course, the role of leadership fell to me at times. Again, whenever possible, I shared those duties. When we gathered wood for the campfire, I participated. When we lighted the campfire, I allowed others to have the sense of accomplishment of building and lighting the campfires. We also shared the preparation of the meals.

The ability to be a participant helped to develop the camaraderie necessary to build a team of participants who interacted well on the excursion. Feedback from the participants says this model was beneficial to their retreat.

Application of Findings

The concept of retreat from normal activity for spiritual renewal is a practice used for millennia. In the Old and New Testaments, accounts of God's servants retreating for spiritual benefit are often found. The model in the books of Mark and Matthew of Jesus regularly retreating to the mountains to pray is a strong focus for the need for regular time away from normal routine. Taking his disciples to the mountains for significant moments is a model Jesus used so they might hear God more clearly (Hanson 147). Offering a liminal model for clergy separation from day-to-day stress and the betwixt-and-between time of excursion backpacking proved to be valuable to the participants in this ministry intervention.

For years, the only models of retreat have been trips to monasteries, time on seminary campuses, retreats sponsored by judicatories or groups such as Shalem Institute, events at retreat centers, and other scheduled events at motels or churches. I found spiritual renewal in physically challenging events. Backpacking provides this physical challenge, allowing for spiritually renewing retreats. For the nine participants in this study as well as for myself, backpacking provides spiritual retreat.

A major identified concern for clergy is stress, new models for clergy spiritual retreat need to be developed. A model of excursion backpacking is promising, especially for clergy who identify themselves as being nurtured by time in nature. Excursion backpacking is a potentially helpful model for clergy spiritual retreat.

In Christian contexts, backpacking events for youth are shown to provide opportunity for spiritual growth. This study suggests the possibility for renewal and spiritual growth for clergy.

I suggest additional teaching on seminary campuses in the area of self-care. Allowing those preparing for the task of parish ministry in this generation to be exposed to numerous models for retreat will be helpful. Events of this nature will underscore the need for regular physical exercise as well as exercising the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, devotional reading, and lifelong learning. Helping seminary students to see the benefits for the excursion of lifelong ministry can be beneficial to dealing with the stress of life.

Suggestions for Further Study

The narrow scope of this study, nine male clergy from a small geographic area, allows for much further study. I had thought of having both female and male clergy as part of this project. For further study, I suggest a similar study be done with a mixed gender group. The logistics of events with mixed gender groups would involve an equal number of each gender in separate groups who would use separate tents and would set up out of sight of each other to enhance privacy for each group.

Establishing excursion backpacking as a model for self-care and tracking the possible benefits of this model of retreat over a period of years is a possibility for a

further study. A study of this nature might take a decade or so of research. A project of this kind is possible if one chooses to experiment with ways of enhancing the design of the event or if future, doctor of ministry researchers build on my experiment and replicate it with variables targeting observed enhancements compared to this model.

One adaptation of research using excursion backpacking as retreat would be to study the self-care practices of persons who begin excursion backpacking as regular spiritual retreat in the early years of parish ministry. Does the physical challenge lead to better physical self-care in the end? Again, this study is longer in nature, but I believe it would be of value.

A person could conduct a study for a region or judicatory of a denominational group. One of interest to me is a study in a region of the country where backpacking areas are easier to access. Questions for consideration are, “is the familiarity or close proximity a benefit, or does it detract from the benefit of events like this one”, “or is it more important to travel further for the event to have maximum benefit?”

This event was one of three days and two nights on the trail. An option for a future study is to look at events of longer duration. For instance, “is the response to four-day and three-night or five-day and four-night events different from shorter events?”(Joy 111)

Outward Bound tends to do events that are even longer in duration, at least seven days in length. Would an event that lasts at least seven days allow for greater benefit to the participants?

Another possible study could involve an event for clergy and spouses. The study here would be more than self-care for the clergy. It could be a study on the health of

parsonage couples. An additional variation for a clergy and spouse event would be to locate in a resort area and provide housing for at least part of the time away from parish life. Can this kind of event benefit relationships as clergy and spouses remove themselves from the stressors of parish life?

Identified Needs in Self-Care Practices

In addition to the formal questionnaire, I received three notes from participants sharing changes they were making in their self-care practices. Each of these unsolicited notes shared the importance of their event in their ministry lives and shared a desire to continue the practice of excursion backpacking as a part of their ongoing self-care practices.

Two of the participants live in the community where I live, and two serve in the same district as I do. One of these has been in a mentoring relationship with me for three years. I have also had contact with each of these participants in addition to the formal questionnaire and interviews. They have shared their continued appreciation for the impact of their event on their ministry. They have also encouraged colleagues to consider participating in a future ministry intervention excursion backpacking retreat. Even with over three months of separation, I recently received an e-mail from the youngest participant reiterating the positive impact of the event on his life and ministry setting.

Postscript

Finding healthy ways to deal with and maybe even relieve stressors in the life of clergy is helpful for life in the long-term. A study such as this ministry intervention study does not answer all the questions of improving spiritual and physical health of clergy. My hope is for this study to add to the growing bank of opportunities for clergy to develop

ways of improving spiritual and physical well-being so they can continue to serve God with energy for decades.

By adding one more option for self-care to the portfolio of opportunities available for spiritual retreat for clergy, I hope a handful of clergy will find a healthy model for spiritual retreat. I hope that others will think outside the walls of what are current practices for retreats and offer even more options.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

Prior to the event:

- How am I feeling about living in the wilderness for three days?
- What are my apprehensions?
- What excites me?
- These are the areas where I expect to be stretched:
- These are areas where I want to grow:
- Write a prayer to assist in your participation.

During the retreat:

- What were my spiritual moments today?
- What, if any, were moments of frustration?
- What was my response to these moments?
- Where did I experience God?
- How will I grow from today's experience?

Following the retreat, please take a few moments during the days following this experience to chronicle your response to your return to "normal":

- What benefits do I bring to my work from this retreat?
- How am I changed by this experience?
- What spiritual practices will benefit from this time apart?

APPENDIX B

PRE-MINISTRY INTERVENTION INTERVIEW

Interview protocol for participants before the event:

- Describe for me a stressful time in the past four weeks.
- Would you consider yourself a person who enjoys the “outdoors”?
- How much hiking have you done?
- Is it a part of your normal activities?
 - If so, how often?
 - What is an average hike for you?
- Have you done any backpacking?
 - If so, what was the duration, distance, and frequency of your trips?
 - If not, is this something that you have wanted to do?
- What are your self-care practices?
 - Do you have a day off each week?
 - Do you take regular retreats?
 - Frequency
 - Duration
 - Do you take regular vacations?
 - What is your exercise regimen?

APPENDIX C

POST-MINISTRY INTERVENTION INTERVIEW

With your journal in your lap, please answer the following questions and return to me:

1. How did you experience the excursion?
2. If and when did you feel that you were fully separated from the parish and plugging into the event?
3. When did you feel fully engaged in the event?
4. What did you learn about yourself in the event?
5. How have you been changed by the event?
6. What do you want to take away from this event?
7. Will this kind of retreat be valuable to your self-care in the future?
8. What would you add/change to improve this kind of event?

After returning this questionnaire, I will schedule a time for an interview to follow up on your responses to these questions.

Thank you for taking the time to complete these questions and return your answers to me.

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION LETTER

Date _____

Dear _____

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and am conducting research on the topic of excursion backpacking as spiritual retreat for clergy. I would like to invite you to be one of the participants in this research project.

My personal experience with retreats of this nature has benefited me in many ways. Your participation will allow me to evaluate your experience of this model for retreats.

As part of this process, I will ask you to keep a journal of your responses to the event. This journal will be for your benefit. The only way any of your information would be shared is with your signed permission.

Please know that at the completion of the event you will not be asked to share any journal entries that you are uncomfortable sharing. You will only share those thoughts and responses you are comfortable sharing. You will not be asked for anything other than what you are completely comfortable sharing with me. My hope is that a model to assist other clergy in benefiting their self-care practices will be developed and shared.

As a way of sharing my appreciation for your participation, I will share my retreat schedule for the next two years with you. You may choose to travel with me on any one of these excursion times as my guest.

These excursions are not dangerous in nature; however, there is potential for minor injuries. By signing this document, you agree that you will not hold the leader, Chuck Shonkwiler responsible for any injuries that may occur during the retreat.

Thank you again for your assistance and willingness to participate in this research project. If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter on the lines provided below.

Sharing in the Ministry of Jesus Christ,

Chuck Shonkwiler

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please print your name: _____

APPENDIX E

BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS FOR EXCURSIONS

Used with permission of the Author.

Great Smoky Mountain Smoke Signals



A Devotional Journal for a Spiritual Backpacking Journey

by

Chuck Tabor
Introduction

You are about to embark on an adventure! The next three days will test you in every way!

This journey you are about to take is more than physical exercise. It is spiritual exercise as well! The quality of the experience you have will in large part depend upon your attitude right now, and your walk (not just literally, but also spiritually!) over the next days.

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NLT)—“So our aim is to please him always,...”

Therefore, to provide a guide for you during this adventure, each day will have Scripture for you to ponder, along with a few questions to guide your thinking. To get the most from this exercise, the following guidelines are suggested for you to follow:

- (1) Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your study and thoughts. Continue your study with an attitude of prayer and meditation, depending upon God to show you what He wants you to gain from this experience.
- (2) Read the Scriptures listed and meditate on them
- (3) Answer the questions associated with each passage, always with the goal of personal application.
- (4) Write a short entry in your daily journal of your experience for the day.

(5) Close your time in prayer, committing your study to Him and allowing Him to accomplish what he will in you with each step you take.

DAY #1—PREPARE THE WAY!

Psalms 19:12-14 (NLT)

¹² How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults.

¹³ Keep me from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin. ¹⁴ May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NLT)

²² throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. ²³ Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true.

1. What "hidden faults" or "deliberate sins" come to mind as you read these verses?
2. When you think about "throwing off the old" and "displaying a new nature," what comes to mind as you do so?
3. What is involved in the "spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes"? What specifically do you have to deal with here. Make a list

JOURNAL:

DAY #2—WALK LIKE KINGS!

Ephesians 4:1-6 (NLT)

¹ Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

² Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

³ Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace.

⁴ We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future.

⁵ There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

⁶ and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all.

1. What qualities ought to characterize a "life worthy of your calling"?
2. What happens when believers live out these qualities?
3. How does each quality promote unity?
4. How does viewing God as Father add to their unity?

JOURNAL:**DAY #3—WALK IN LOVE AND LIGHT****Ephesians 5:1-2 (NLT)**

¹ Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him.

Ephesians 5:8-11 (NLT)

⁸ For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, rebuke and expose them.

1. What model does Paul hold up for us to follow in 5:1? What model does he hold up in 5:8?
2. What incentives does he give in these verses to live according to these models?
3. Brainstorm and come up with at least five ways you can follow the example of Christ as shown in these verses.

JOURNAL:**DAY #4—WALK IN WISDOM****Ephesians 5:15-21 (NLT)**

¹⁵ So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise.

¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸ Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.

¹⁹ Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1. What contrasts are drawn between the old and the new in these verses? Of what significance are they?
2. What are the results of living a Spirit-filled life, as given in these verses?
3. How do **you** "always give thanks for everything"?
4. How filled with the Spirit have you been on this backpacking journey? What areas do you need to work on, with the Spirit's guidance?
5. What do you want to take away from this experience?

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